



FICTION IS THE LIE THROUGH WHICH WE TELL THE TRUTH: THE EXPERIENCE  
OF FICTIONAL IDENTIFICATION IN ADOLESCENCE

JOÃO MARIA FINO NEVES ANDRÉ

Nº26618

**Orientador de Dissertação:**

PROFESSOR DOUTOR VICTOR AMORIM RODRIGUES

**Professor de Seminário de Dissertação:**

PROFESSOR DOUTOR VICTOR AMORIM RODRIGUES

**Dissertação submetida como requisito parcial para a obtenção do grau de:**

MESTRE EM PSICOLOGIA

Especialidade em Psicologia Clínica

2025

Dissertação de Mestrado realizada sob a orientação de Prof. Doutor Vítor Amorim Rodrigues apresentada no ISPA – Instituto Universitário para obtenção de grau de Mestre na especialidade de Psicologia Clínica, conforme o despacho da DGES nº19673/2006 publicado em Diário da República 2º série de 26 de Setembro de 2006

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First of all, I would like to thank my family for their immense support in allowing me to pursue this vocation that I hold so dear. In many ways, this master's dissertation is the result of a joint and cumulative effort sustained by their unconditional love. To my mother, who as always upheld my choices and made sure that I had every condition necessary to fulfill them—you are my greatest supporter and the person I hope to make proudest. To my father, who is no longer with us but will always remain close in spirit.

To my girlfriend, Cate, who has made undeniable sacrifices to make sure I am able to fully concentrate on this deeply personal and passionate project. There is no doubt that she has put some of her own needs in the background to make sure mine are at the forefront—for that, you have my eternal love and gratitude.

To my best friends—you know who you are—thank you for making the weight of my work, and at times my perceived self-importance regarding it, much lighter. My ideas would mean nothing if not for your willingness to listen and engage in conversation.

To my co-author and supervisor, Vitor Amorim Rodrigues, I want to express my admiration for your character and for your guidance—without it, I would be lost in the confusion of my own thoughts.

To the fine institution that ISPA is, I wish to express my gratitude for always championing the principles of intellectual freedom and for holding commitment to a psychological tradition that I truly believe in. I have no disbelief that ISPA's mark on my professional and personal ethic will endure.

In the end, what I am most thankful for is that this work, and all its encompassing aspects, mean something to me. I believe in what I am doing—and I hope that cynicism, hopelessness, or time do not overshadow that belief.

## RESUMO

Este estudo examinou como os adolescentes experienciam e interpretam a sua identificação com personagens e mundos fictícios. Assente numa estrutura existencial-fenomenológica, a ficção foi abordada como uma arena simbólica onde se desenrola a identidade, a moralidade e a pertença. Recorrendo à Análise Fenomenológica Interpretativa (AFI), foram realizadas entrevistas semiestruturadas a oito adolescentes dos 16 aos 17 anos de um contexto escolar internacional. Os resultados revelaram que os adolescentes se envolvem com a ficção como um espaço existencial e de desenvolvimento do devir. Através da identificação, revisitaram os seus “eus” passados, exploraram tensões morais e ensaiaram futuros possíveis. A ficção não foi vivida como separada da realidade, mas como a sua extensão—um mundo "como se" onde convergem a emoção, a corporização e a imaginação. Temas de reconhecimento, autenticidade e transformação emergiram como centrais: a ficção espelhava as identidades em evolução dos adolescentes, oferecia pertença onde a realidade a negava e proporcionava experiências simbólicas de liberdade e responsabilidade. A identificação ficcional surge, portanto, como uma prática interpretativa vivida que permite aos adolescentes articular quem já são no processo de se tornarem. A ficção não é uma fuga à realidade, mas antes a sua continuação mais reflexiva, mediando o diálogo entre a imaginação e a existência.

**Palavras-chave:** Identificação ficcional, adolescência, fenomenologia, construção de sentido, autenticidade

## ABSTRACT

This study examined how adolescents experience and interpret their identification with fictional characters and worlds. Anchored in an existential–phenomenological framework, fiction was approached as a symbolic arena where identity, morality, and belonging unfold. Using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight adolescents aged 16 to 17 from an international school context. Findings revealed that adolescents engage with fiction as a developmental and existential space of becoming. Through identification, they revisited past selves, explored moral tensions, and rehearsed possible futures. Fiction was not experienced as separate from reality but as its extension—an “as-if” world where emotion, embodiment, and imagination converge. Themes of recognition, authenticity, and transformation emerged as central: fiction mirrored adolescents’ evolving identities, offered belonging where reality withheld it, and provided symbolic experiments in freedom and responsibility. Fictional identification thus appears as a lived, interpretative practice that allows adolescents to articulate who they already are in the process of becoming. Fiction is not an escape from reality but its most reflective continuation, mediating the dialogue between imagination and existence.

**Keywords:** Fictional identification, adolescence, phenomenology, meaning-making, authenticity

## INDEX

Chapter I: Introduction	p. 1
Chapter II: Theoretical Background	p. 3
1. Adolescence as a Developmental Stage	p. 3
2. Narrative, Story, and Mean-Making in Human Development	p. 6
3. Identification: Psychological Perspectives	p. 8
4. Fictional Identification: Definition and Mechanisms	p.10
5. Immersion, Embodiment, and Presence in Fiction	p.13
6. Fiction and Moral Development	p.15
7. Recognition, Belonging, and Representation	p.17
8. Family, Control, and Expectation in Fictional Narratives	p.19
9. Symbolism, Metaphor, and Aesthetic Dimensions	p.20
Chapter III: Theoretical Positioning	p.23
Chapter IV: Methodology	p.29
1.1 Research Design - IPA	p.29
1.2 Participants	p.30
1.3 Data Collection	p.32
1.4 Analytical Process	p.32
1.5 Ethical Consideration	p.34
1.6 Reflexivity and Quality Assurance	p.34
Chapter V: Results/Analysis	p.35
1.1 Personal Experiential Themes (PET's)	p.35
1.2 Group Experiential Themes (GET's)	p.41
Chapter VI: Discussion	p.49
Chapter VII: Conclusion	p.57
Chapter VIII: Limitations and Future Research	p.59
Chapter X: Bibliography	p.60
Chapter XI: Annexes	p.69
Annex A - Consent Forms	p.69
Annex B - Interview Script	p.71
Annex C - GET 5: Families, Control, and Expectation	p.73

Annex D - Ana's Interview	p.75
Annex E - Xiaohua's Interview	p.83
Annex F - Nathan's Interview	p.93
Annex G - Sofia's Interview	p.101
Annex H - Dann's Interview	p.117
Annex I - Omar's Interview	p.126
Annex J - Madison's Interview	p.134
Annex K - Isabella's PET Analysis	p.147

## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The first anatomically modern humans (*Homo sapiens*) with physical features similar to those we have today were found around 300,000 years ago in sites like Jebel Irhoud (Morocco) and Omo Kibish (Ethiopia). These early humans had similar-like brains, skull shapes, and skeletal proportions compared to our anatomically modern criteria (Hublin et al., 2017). Similar to modern humans, these *Homo sapiens* engaged in the meaningful act of storytelling. The actual first accounts of structure-like storytelling actually predate the anatomically modern *Homo sapiens* (1,000,000–300,000 years ago), emerging in what anthropologists call proto-language: sequences of meaning expressed via body language and rhythm (Donald, 1991; Tattersall, 2019). This suggests that the ability to sequence meaning across time—which is what stories do—may have even predated formal language development. Once humans developed language and symbolic culture, they began gathering around fire to tell their stories. Even today, cognitive anthropologists found that hunter-gatherer groups hold practical conversations during the day that transition into stories, myths, and moral tales at night (Wiessner, 2014). By the time written language was developed (5,000–5,500 years ago), humans had been practicing the art of storytelling for at least 100,000 years (Boyd, 2009).

The earliest account of written storytelling began in ancient Sumer with *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, which tells the story of a heroic king who, after the death of his friend, confronts his own mortality by embarking on a quest for immortality—only to discover that being human is what gives life meaning (Dalley, 1998). *The Epic of Gilgamesh* is not merely an old story; it is the first existential narrative—humanity’s earliest recorded reflection on mortality, friendship, and the search for meaning (Tigay, 1982).

In summation, this historical account of the importance of story does not rest on it being a passive activity that distracts us from the passage of time; it represents a meaningful way through which humans have communicated knowledge, values, identity, and belonging (Gottschall, 2012).

Beyond having a deep cultural and developmental history of at least 100,000 years of storytelling heritage, the typical human of today—whether through books, movies, games, or TV shows—has access to more stories than ever before. For adolescents in particular, their entire cultural and symbolic space is inundated with fictional stories, potentially offering

meaningful opportunities to better understand themselves, much like their ancestors did in the past (Oatley, 2011; Mar & Oatley, 2008).

The very ground on which this investigation rests is predicated on the inherent desire for adolescents to find meaning through story—where fiction, as a symbolic space, becomes the meeting point between lived experience and phenomenological interpretation. At a time when adolescence is not only seen as developmental transition but also as an existential and psychological transformation, fiction can potentially serve as a space to symbolically explore identity (Erikson, 1968; Kroger, 2007).

Personally, the motivation for exploring this topic stems from my own engagement with fiction during youth. This personal connection evolved into academic curiosity as I began to explore Jungian literature—more specifically, the study of myths and archetypes that recur through the collective unconscious across cultures and time—alongside a growing intellectual interest in existential thought and phenomenology, which is regarded as the comprehensive framework for understanding the human capacity to interpret subjective experience (Heidegger, 1927/1962; Jung, 1959; van Deurzen, 2012).

Investigating the intersecting topics of adolescence, story, and existential thought revealed an empirical gap: a lack of phenomenological research on fictional identification in adolescence. On one hand, the relationship between adolescence and fiction has predominantly been examined within cognitive and social frameworks, rather than through experiential meaning; on the other, there is a noticeable absence of existential framing that acknowledges fiction's symbolic role. To bridge this gap, we formulated our methodological aim: to explore how adolescents experience and make sense of their identification with fictional characters and worlds.

To better understand this relationship from an experiential standpoint, we selected the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as our method of choice, given its idiographic commitment and focus on lived meaning (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). As an extension of this methodological approach, we conducted semi-structured interviews with eight adolescents between the ages of 16 and 17 years old.

The following chapters will first present an overview of the relevant theoretical positioning to situate the reader within the current literature, before proceeding to the analytical findings.

## CHAPTER II : THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

### 1. Adolescence as a Developmental Stage

As it is common in the process of exploring an undeveloped concept—which stands as the fundamental act of this dissertation—it is first necessary to establish a conceptual foundation. This involves defining and clarifying key axiomatic terms that implicitly sustain the subsequent analysis, ensuring that the researcher is not left questioning the very premises upon which the investigation is built.

One of the key axiomatic terms underlined in the context of this paper, is a period of transition during which all individuals find themselves in their development—*adolescence*. As was purposefully highlighted, adolescence is defined as a transitional bridge of development from childhood into adulthood. This stage usually arises with the onset of puberty, between the ages of 10 and 12, and extends onto the late teens or early twenties (Steinberg, 2014). This stage marks one of the early periods of biological development, characterized by growth spurts, hormonal shifts, sexual maturation, and the emergence of secondary sex characteristics. In many ways, these marked biological changes deeply affect the perception individuals have of themselves (Steinberg, 2014). Due to its capacity to overwhelm, the period of adolescence involves a deep restructuring of cognitive, emotional, and relational functioning. A combination of biopsychosocial factors elucidates that it is not solely a biological transition, but also a new stage that involves cultural and psychosocial facets that the individual has never faced before (Arnett, 2004).

Existentially, this is a stage of profound questioning, where adolescents begin to ask questions and raise doubts regarding absolute notions once held. During this time, young people wrestle with themes of authenticity, death, freedom and isolation, asking “Who am I?”, “What do I want to become?”, and “What is my place in the world?” (Yalom, 1980; van Deurzen, 2012; Tillich, 1952; May, 1983; Erikson, 1968).

As a consequence of this symbolic Socratic questioning of the self, identity develops; however, it does not do so linearly. Erik H. Erikson theorized that central to adolescence is a psychosocial crisis—a “battle,” per se—between the consolidation of identity and role confusion (Erikson, 1968). This “battle” may create two paths: one, described by unsuccessful resolution, which may manifest in uncertainty about future paths, an unstable self-image, or difficulty committing; and a second, characterized by a successful resolution, leading to the

ability to willingly commit to values and relationships without feeling a shock to the sense of self. To go through this process successfully means that the adolescent shapes a coherent self capable of integrating childhood identifications with future aspirations and societal demands (Erikson, 1968).

As a way to extend these ideas, James Marcia (1966) developed four identity modes of being, underlined by two principal dimensions: exploration and commitment. The first stage, identity diffusion, reflects a state of constant apathy caused by the inability to either explore or commit. The second, foreclosure, is characterized by the blind and dogmatic following of parental expectations, foreclosing any exploration within the process of commitment. The third stage, psychosocial moratorium, refers to a period in which the individual freely explores roles, ideologies, and lifestyles but remains unwilling to commit to one. The fourth and final stage, identity achievement, stands at the center of Marcia's theory regarding healthy development: a state of commitment that follows exploration, bringing direction and a stable sense of *self* (Marcia 1966).

The model described by Marcia (1966) implies that there is an inherent fluidity to all of the stages, explaining there is an ability to interchange within them throughout life. Yet, it is this fluidity—that is especially marked during adolescence—that characterizes this stage as a very dynamic stage of development (Marcia 1980).

The onset of this stage is accompanied by changes in emotion and cognition that either affect, or are a direct consequence of, the fluidity that was mentioned (Arnett, 2004; Steinberg, 2014). The dawning of the *formal operational stage*, which brings with it the ability to think abstractly and hypothetically—inciting adolescents to wrestle with questions of justice, morality, and philosophy—has a direct impact on the fluidity of adolescence (Piaget, 1972; Kohlberg, 1984). Simultaneously, adolescents begin to formulate scientific reasoning, developing the ability to test hypothesis and to solve complex problems. As a consequence, they begin to orient themselves towards long-term thinking and to consider the impact of their present choices in their envisioned future (Piaget, 1972; Steinberg, 2014).

Notoriously, this is a phase marked by changes in emotional intensity. The illustration of these changes is partially rooted in biology, as the maturation of the limbic system predates the maturation of the prefrontal cortex, meaning that emotion and sensitivity are prioritized over planning and inhibition. This imbalance could potentially result in

impulsive behavior (Steinberg, 2014). As mentioned, these changes in emotional development are partially rooted in biology; yet, they are also equally represented in psychology. David Elkind (1967) proposed that adolescence is characterized by an egocentrism promoted by a general sense of uniqueness: a personal fable adolescents “tell themselves,” fueling creativity and risk-taking behavior. In addition, this sense of uniqueness is supported by the belief that every act is consequential and witnessed, and that there is an “imaginary audience” endowed with the ability to judge one’s every action (Elkind, 1967).

What has been described to this point is a state of heightened sensitivity that is equally attuned to positive and negative emotion. On one hand, teenagers develop an empathy that allows them to emotionally adapt towards others and their perspectives, being able to “intake” their emotional states. On the other, this ability to sense emotion causes a mood fluctuation where highs and lows are extremely common. Mediating a considerable part of this fluctuation is culture and the *milieu* (Hoffman, 2000; Eisenberg & Strayer, 1987; Steinberg, 2014).

During this time, families remain highly influential—whether they are encouraging or inhibiting the process of independence, or implicitly communicating expectations of an ideal identity. The act of balancing autonomy and connection brings about an increase in familial conflict, which usually decreases in yearly adulthood as relationships become more egalitarian (Steinberg, 2014).

Negotiating independence and autonomy in order to develop a coherent sense of self is a process heavily influenced by peers, which become the primary source of socialization during adolescence. If the influence is healthy, peers become a source of companionship, emotional support, and a testing ground for new identities; if not, they promote adolescent pathology by adopting impulsive and anti-social behaviors (Steinberg, 2014; Monahan et al. 2009).

In the end, culture provides a “cutoff”—a final boundary—preceding the full transition between adolescence and adulthood. In some cultures, this transition is highly abrupt, pushing individuals into concrete axioms of adult roles such as marriage, work, and parenthood. Other societies, like Western culture, can potentially propagate the effects of the aforementioned psychosocial moratorium—infantilizing their youth and prolonging their passage into adulthood (Arnett, 2000).

## 2. Narrative, Story, and Mean-Making in Human Development

An essential part of living as a human being implies being subject to the more chaotic aspects of our existence. This chaos, which takes many forms—but for argument's sake presents itself as psychological suffering—is a communality we all share (Frankl, 2006; Yalom, 1980). In many ways, suffering and trauma accompany every stage of our development until death (Kleinman, 1988). Throughout history, there have been many ways in which humans have attempted to successfully control and diminish suffering, whether through religious practice, medicine, philosophy, science, politics, or any other worldly tenet. Essentially, the attempt to manage suffering is none other than the collective effort to give meaning and sense to the calamity that is constantly looming over us (Neimeyer, 2001). Through our inner search, we have discovered a way to bestow meaning and to keep suffering at bay—*narrative* (Bruner, 1990; McAdams, 1993).

A narrative is a cohesive and coherent story with a clear beginning, middle, and end, that introduces unresolved questions or conflicts and ultimately offers a resolution. Narrative nurtures a deep psychological desire to make experience feel integrated and logical, doing so by creating a structure that organizes memory, identity, and purpose (Hinyard & Kreuter, 2007; Bruner, 1990; McAdams, 1993).

Narrative's influence on the self has been theorized in different ways, each piling on the other, constructing an overview of its undeniable importance on human development. In his work *Acts of Meaning*, Jerome Bruner (1990) highlights narrative as a mode of thought segmented between paradigmatic thinking, which is focused on objectivity and scientific-based reasoning; and narrative thinking, which in turn is a storied, context-dependent, and human way of constituting reality.

As an extension of this idea, Paul Ricoeur and Dan McAdams both theorized that narrative was not only a way of thinking, but also a fundamental axis of identity. McAdams (1993) discussed the concept of identity as an evolving story anchored by key features: nuclear episodes, themes of agency, communion, and motifs of redemption or contamination. In short, these main features of everyone's personal story provide a path where individuals gain growing self-determination about their past, present, and future. Empirically, McAdams is focused on what stories people tell and what themes they use (McAdams, 1993, 2001). Ricoeur (1992), on the other hand, emphasized that identity is mediated and reconfigured

through narrative. Similar to McAdams, he argued that identity is not fixed, but continually interpreted and re-interpreted; however, Ricoeur placed greater emphasis on how narrative is structured in relation to time and selfhood. Specifically, he outlined two modes of identity: *idem*, which refers to sameness and symbolizes stability; and *ipse*, which refers to selfhood—the reflexive dimension of identity that allows for change and renewal over time. Narrative identity is then conceptualized as the mediating agent between these two poles, through what Ricoeur calls *emplotment*: the interpretative configuration of past events into a story that is retrospectively coherent.

The concept of emplotment serves as an adequate introduction into another crucial aspect of narrative: memory (Ricoeur, 1992). The interplay between memory and narrative functions as a way of piecing together our life's story, utilizing narrative as a way to fill the gaps of our history by restructuring it and giving it purpose. In this way, we do not remember experience as accurate copies but instead view it with deep subjective meaning, akin to myth (McAdams, 1993; Sarbin, 1986). As a consequence of developing an autobiographical story that is progressively more structured, individuals—specifically adolescents—begin to devise scripts about major life events. Many of these involve typical events of this stage—whether it is a first kiss, a first love, or a graduation. These are examples of built-in cultural expectations that may vary in situation but not in principle (Habermas & Bluck, 2000). Bruner (1990) emphasized the way in which culture breeds myths, stories, and archetypes that remain vividly present throughout time, and that enable individuals to use them to make sense of their own lives.

Throughout this passage, there has been an attempted to adequately draw a path from the search of meaning, onto narrative, and onto story—ultimately arriving at identity (Bruner, 1990; Ricoeur, 1992; McAdams, 1993). There are planes in which we develop narratives and stories, such was the example given of autobiographical memory: a way in which we mould our subjectivity into a more coherent form (Habermas & Bluck, 2000; McAdams, 2001). Another plane on which we build narratives is fiction. Fiction acts as a symbolic playground for individuals to explore different modes of existence. Through fiction's imaginative capabilities, one has the ability to project different futures and reflect on various facets of the past. If an identity is not pathologically or developmentally rigid, the subject is able to try out

possible selves, imagining a lived experience through the eyes of another (Oatley, 1999; Mar & Oatley, 2008).

Since its conception, narrative identity has been a point of debate and conversation, mainly because it theoretically revolves around complex and grandiose topics: identity being one, culture another, as well as development and pathology (McAdams, 1993; Ricoeur, 1992). For example, defining identity as a single constant through time as opposed to an individual's ability to sustain multiple disjointed narratives (*dialogical self theory*) has been a considerable point of debate (Hermans, 2001; Gergen, 1991). Another prominent conversation relates to culture—trying to understand how it can dominate or enable personal storytelling (Bruner, 1990). Developmental timing is also worthy of consideration, as it is difficult to adequately predict when narrative identity actually consolidates (Habermas & Bluck, 2000). Finally, it is worth mentioning pathology. We are yet to fully grasp the healing potential of having a narrative identity that is built on a redemption arc and a story of resilience, as opposed to a more pathological narrative that inhibits agency and fuels depression (McAdams, 2001; Neimeyer, 2001; Adler et al., 2006).

In summary, we have raised several conceptions that are highly relevant to the principal theme at hand. First, narrative has been shown to function as a tool for making sense of existence (Bruner, 1990; Ricoeur, 1992). Second, the way in which we shape these narratives is influenced by both memory and culture (Habermas & Bluck, 2000; Bruner, 1990). Third, we find that adolescence presents itself as a tender period of development where life's stories begin to take shape and solidify, largely through the influence of autobiography and the cultural *milieu* (Steinberg, 2014; Habermas & Bluck, 2000; McAdams, 1993). Having identified memory and culture as foundational aspects of identity, we can now turn to another influential factor: identification.

### **3. Identification: Psychological Perspectives**

Before turning to the broader aspects of fiction and its relation to identification, it is necessary to pause on the latter, as it constitutes one of the more implicit axes of this investigation. Having established this, we begin, coincidentally, with etymology.

The origins of *identification* can be traced back to Latin: *identitas*, from *idem* (“sameness”), and *facere* (“to make”). Combined, these formed the Medieval Latin *identificare*, meaning “to make the same” or “to establish sameness” (Oxford Learner’s

Dictionaries, n.d.). The word entered English in the seventeenth century, but it was only in the nineteenth century that it acquired a psychological and sociological dimension (Harper, n.d.-a; Merriam-Webster, n.d.-a).

The tilt between identification and psychology began with one of the first formal iterations of the psychological approach—one that sought to include identification in a model of identity development: Freudian psychoanalysis (Freud, 1900/1953). Freud (1923) initiated the study of identification by focusing on the relationship between the Oedipal Situation and the object-cathexis. Firstly, he explained that during the Oedipal situation the child develops an object-cathexis with the mother, while at the same time identifying with the father (Freud, 1923). In the end, the child is forced to give up its object once it realizes that neither the mother nor the father are attainable sexual objects. At this moment, two things can happen: either the child displaces his identification to the mother, or the feeling of identification with the father intensifies (and vice versa). The conclusion of this situation brings about ego and superego formation within the child's character, thus completing the cycle through which the object is set up inside the ego through identification (Freud, 1923). In the end, Freud writes: “Identification is the earliest and original form of an emotional tie with another person” (Freud, 1900/1953, p. 105).

Freud's *ethos* births an official psychoanalytical definition of identification, which describes, “a psychological process whereby the subject assimilates an aspect, property, or attribute of another, and is transformed, wholly or partially, after the model the other provides” (Pontalis, 2019).

In addition to Freud's work, his younger daughter, Anna Freud, made valuable contributions to her father's work, especially regarding identification during puberty. Freud (2018) describes object relations at puberty as, “assimilating oneself as much as possible to the person who at the moment occupies the central place in one's affection” (Freud, 2018, p. 178). Usually, this fixated assimilation is not with the objects from childhood, which, in a sense, are repudiated from the ego and translate into a rejection of the family. The analyst asserts that during this period, one does not relate to others as described in traditional object relations, but instead through “identifications of the most primitive kind”—where passion, fealty, and adulation are as intensely adopted as they are abandoned (Freud, 2018, p. 179).

Out of the roots of Freudian conceptualization, Erikson (1968) elaborates his own view on the role of identification in identity development. He posits that the identifications of childhood must be subordinated to a new kind of identification—one that moves beyond the psychologically individualist condition of childhood into the psychosocial realm of adolescence (Erikson, 1968). To give shape to this process, he advances a psychosocial schedule that develops in three stages. It begins with introjection, whereby the child absorbs the affective states of primary figures, providing a protective base from which he learns to feel. This is followed by identification, mediated by the family and the broader “hierarchy of roles.” Finally comes identity formation itself, a task that requires the adolescent to reject certain identifications of childhood while integrating others into a reconfigured whole (Erikson, 1968). Crucially, this development is contingent on the validation conferred by the milieu—family, school, and community—each providing opportunities for experimental identifications and displaying models of existence sanctioned by society. In this way, identity crystallizes through the delicate balance between the demands imposed by the collective and the self’s own affirmation within it (Erikson, 1968).

In summation, the concept of identification has evolved from Freud’s original emphasis on unconscious processes and intrapsychic dynamics, through Anna Freud’s observations of adolescent volatility, to Erikson’s psychosocial framing of identity formation. Together, these perspectives demonstrate the centrality of identification to human development (Freud, 1923; Freud, 2018; Erikson, 1968).

#### **4. Fictional Identification: Definition and Mechanisms**

The core idea of *fictional identification* is one that requires a multifaceted explanation. The central concept is a process by which the individual, through imagination, temporarily adopts the perspective, emotions, and goals of a fictional character. This definition has been elaborated by four key scholars—Cohen (2001), Oatley (1999, 2002), and Green and Brock (2000, 2004)—each contributing distinct elements to the theoretical consensus on fictional identification. Cohen (2001) explains that fictional identification is a cognitive, emotional, and motivational adoption of a character’s perspective. For Cohen, fictional identification is slightly different from empathy or sympathy, because of the intent the subject possesses when seeking to identify, explaining it as a more intentional desire to merge with the character. Oatley (1999, 2002) adds to this perspective by layering another

component: simulation. He explains that fictional worlds allow individuals to “try on” different roles within a fictional social world, engaging with it safely. Green and Brock (2000, 2004) add to the broader concept by introducing Transportation Theory, which, in principle, allows one to be immersed and transported into a narrative world.

In order to accurately define fictional identification, it is necessary to account for the subtle nuances that surround this concept. Referring back to transportation theory. The process of identification can occur simultaneously with transportation; however, they are conceptually different, in the sense that identifying implies a specific character, whereas transporting is more akin to a fictional world. Practically speaking, it is the subtle difference of identifying with Harry Potter, opposed to the wish of living in Hogwarts (Green & Brock, 2000). Another relevant conceptual nuance is empathy. While consuming fiction, one may feel an emotional attunement to the character or content being consumed, adjusting their states of happiness or sadness in solidarity with the material. Strict identification goes a step further by adding an element of “becoming”, not just empathizing (Decety & Jackson, 2004). Adjacent to empathy is the process of perspective-taking: the cognitive act of imagining the world through the lens of another. Perspective-taking is one of the dimensions of identification, but it fails to account for affective and motivational components (Galinsky et al., 2005). Lastly, we introduce wishful identification, which is more in line with aspiring to be like a particular character, idolizing it. The main difference that separates wishful identification from identification is time, considering the former has an orientation toward the future and the latter an orientation toward the “now” (Hoffner & Cantor, 1991).

Idolizing a character leads us into our next point of discussion: admiration. Admiration, within the context of fictional identification, suggests that the subject adopts an evaluative stance toward the fictional person, which, in turn, implies a certain distance between character and self, maintaining an identity that remains intact. The main distinction is that identification allows for a blur between boundaries, making it difficult to precisely pinpoint where the self ends and the figure begins (Cohen, 2001).

Cohen’s definition of fictional identification is underlined by three dimensions: cognition, emotion, and motivation (Cohen, 2001). By elucidating these dimensions as mechanisms, we’re able to comprehensively trace a theoretical path towards fictional identification.

What is observed is that profound contact with fictional material allows for cognitive activation—more specifically, schema activation. Through the use of mental frameworks, the individual starts to possess the ability to actually think through the character, utilizing their perspective to interpret real-life events. Simultaneously, the subject begins to adopt the character's goals, beliefs, and their decision making-processes—allowing the process of role-taking to commence (Oatley, 1999; Cohen, 2001). Concurrent with cognition, the subject deepens the emotional tie, fogging the lines of emotional difference and experiencing the character's feelings as if they were their own. Aligning emotional states with the character causes a heightened empathic response, making emotions feel more vivid and intense through identification (Oatley, 2002; Igartua, 2010). Combining cognitive and emotional mechanisms influences motivational one's as well, where individuals suspend or disavow their own goals in favor of the character's—even beginning to explore possible selves through the fictional relationship (Cohen, 2001; Markus & Nurius, 1986).

Currently, there is some contention regarding the sequential aspect of this general mechanism. Some of the referenced authors frame identification as starting with cognitive role-taking; while others, understand it as a process which begins with an emotional stimulation. Cohen (2001) defends a rational and intellectual way of connecting with fiction, while Oatley (1999, 2002) explains it as an instinctive and emotional connection that is made instant by fiction's ability to trigger emotion. Igartua (2010) discusses emotion and cognition as complementary, feeding into each other in a reciprocal loop. Nonetheless, we find that each component compounds one after the other, adding layer after layer of deeper involvement. As mentioned, these aspects can happen independently, although it is their combination that consolidates the act of identifying with a fictional character. (Cohen, 2001; Igartua, 2010; Oatley, 2002).

As noted throughout this text—both in memory, narrative, and culture—adolescents constantly pursue safe avenues of exploration, specifically searching for symbolic locations that facilitate the projection of their future selves (Steinberg, 2014; McAdams, 1993). By drawing a focus to the more motivational aspects of fictional identification, we see fiction as a realm in which adolescents can safely explore these projections (Cohen, 2001; Oatley, 1999).

Motivation itself implies a desire to move forward, to orient oneself toward possibility. Jean Paul Sartre (1943/1992) states that conscience is a continual state of

*becoming*. During adolescence, the desire to become is ever present, joined by a search to find meaning in freedom and in responsibility (Yalom, 1980). In many ways, identifying with fictional characters is an adolescent's manifestation of the existential freedom to become, offering a symbolic space to explore choices and consequences without judgement, before actually trying to enact them on the world (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Oatley, 2002; Sartre, 1943/1992; Yalom, 1980).

## **5. Immersion, Embodiment, and Presence in Fiction**

The focus of research now moves to the aspects that contour the lived experience of engaging with fiction. To this aim, we introduce three distinct but related concepts in media psychology and narrative studies: *immersion*, *embodiment*, and *presence* (Green & Brock, 2000; Calleja, 2011). To begin their exploration we have to ask: How do these processes facilitate fictional identification, and how do they make narratives feel meaningful, especially for adolescents?

Immersion is described as the state of being cognitively and emotionally absorbed in a mediated world. Its premise is based on combining the two dimensions of fictional identification—cognition and emotion—into one powerful feeling (Ryan, 2001; Green & Brock, 2000). The process of immersion is described by Green and Brok (2004) as gradual, escalating from attention, to absorption, and finally onto deep engagement. Conceptually, it is closely related to transportation theory, which is an overall facilitator of identification and a fundamental aspect of the suspension of disbelief (Green & Brock, 2004). Another closely related but distinct concept to immersion is flow. Flow enables readers, viewers, and gamers to sustain a deep state of concentration and focus, allowing hours of profound engagement with content. In a place where time and space awareness diminishes, one is able to freely bend the constrictions of the real world and mentally live within a boundless virtuality (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997/2014).

Immersion implicitly brings forth the concept of presence. In virtual reality and gaming research, presence is described as the psychological sense of being within a mediated environment—in essence, it is the feeling that “you are there” (Slater & Wilbur, 1997; Lombard & Ditton, 1997). This general feeling of being present encompasses a spacial presence, that makes the subject feel physically present in the fictional space; a social presence, which promotes the perspective that characters are real social agents; and a self-

presence, which is the feeling that one's own identity or body is located within the virtual world (Lee, 2004; (Biocca, Harms, & Burgoon, 2003; Biocca, 1997). Presence includes a more technological tilt, including aspects that are more interactive and that require user agency over the content, possibly influencing the totality of constructs that have been described (Lee, 2004; Riva et al., 2007).

Presence itself raises a relevant question: whether it is primarily perceptual or phenomenological. If presence is primarily perceptual, then the user has the illusion that they are not in a mediated setting—meaning that the medium is so effective in conveying an artificial reality that convinces the individual's perception that they are acting in a real world. For example, if the in-game avatar is attacked, the user evades—not because it is a real bodily threat, but because it is a perceptual one (Slater & Wilbur, 1997; Lombard & Ditton, 1997). This condition depends largely on technological strength, following the rule that the more real it feels, the more present the user will be (Slater, 2003). If presence is primarily phenomenological, then it is understood as a subjective state of consciousness and absorption—stressing that presence is more about the way people experience and interpret the mediated world rather than being a consequence of technological advancement (Lee, 2004; Riva et al., 2007). Juxtaposing the in-game example, we find that getting “lost in a novel” is not a consequence of technological illusion, but it is still a very strong subjective sense of existing in a storied world (Green & Brock, 2000; Ryan, 2001).

Embodiment goes one step further, explaining a process of inhabiting or enacting a character's body, perspective, or role (Calleja, 2011; Klimmt, Hefner, Vorderer, Roth, & Blake, 2010). Embodiment is expressed in multiple ways, such as customizing an in-game avatar to look like the user, cosplaying or acting, or even through actual embodied simulation (simulating the physical experience of a character) (Bailenson & Blascovich, 2004; Gallese, 2007; Lamerichs, 2011). Adjacent to this concept is identification through embodiment, meaning that the individual does not just imagine the relationship with the character in a more hypothetical stance—like pretending or imagining—but also as a feeling of “*with*” and “*in*” the character. This is the case of a more holistic identification, where boundaries between character and subject are markedly blurred (Calleja, 2011; Klimmt et al., 2009). To close on the topic of embodiment, attention is drawn to the Proteus Effect, which traces a path between virtual embodiment and its ability to shape self-perception and behavior (Yee & Bailenson,

2007). Practically, this effect could be highlighted in a scenario where playing as, or embodying, a superhero increases prosocial action (Ratan et al., 2020).

One final aspect that complements the interplay between immersion, embodiment, and presence is replayability. When a true connection is made between fiction and subject, it rarely occurs only once. Many who feel connected to media find ways to nurture their attachment by rewatching, replaying, and rereading the content that absorbed them (Klimmt, Hefner, & Vorderer, 2009; Vorderer, Klimmt, & Ritterfeld, 2004). Throughout their development, adolescents can revisit stories and characters from which they derived personal meaning, whether through satisfying a need for comfort or by finding new ways to reflect on their past, doing so in a place that is considered safe (Mar & Oatley, 2008; Green, 2005; Cohen, 2001; Valkenburg & Peter, 2013).

Practical examples of typical adolescent activities have been purposefully introduced throughout this section to provide a glimpse of how susceptible they may be to the powerful conversion that is—being absorbed, feeling present, and embodying a character in fictional identification.

## **6. Fiction and Moral Development**

As discussed earlier in the section “*Adolescence as a Developmental Stage*”, adolescence brings about an attempt to conceptualize the world. This is a time in which there is a profound reassessment of values, as well as the adoption of a critical-thinking attitude toward highly relevant dichotomies—the integration of which will dictate much of the transition into adulthood (Piaget, 1972; Erikson, 1968). Themes revolving around loyalty and autonomy, family and peers, personal gain and justice are heavily present in the adolescent’s mind (Steinberg, 2014). Navigating these personal and global dichotomies—whether in a healthy or unhealthy manner—implies the presence and exploration of morality (Kohlberg, 1984).

Within existential thought, ethical becoming is often depicted as a considerable developmental hurdle—an abstract barrier the individual must confront to achieve the state of authentic being (Yalom, 1980; van Deurzen, 2012). According to Kierkegaard (1983), the process of becoming ethical means that authenticity and authentic choices need to be prioritized in the face of anxiety. For Nietzsche (2006), values are constructed in challenge; they are constructed by resolving conflicts and overcoming the self’s own shortcomings. For

Sartre (1992), the inherent freedom we possess is a responsibility, meaning that every choice we make matters. Through various forms, fiction often mirrors these struggles. A fundamental aspect of general storytelling is presenting situations in which protagonists need to act authentically, face responsibility, and confront consequences (Bruner, 1990; McAdams, 1993). Before facing these existential challenges in the real world, adolescents need to procure safe spaces to symbolically act them out (Erikson, 1968; Mar & Oatley, 2008). In this way, fiction can act as a *sandbox*, a place where adolescents can “try on” new identities, roles, and decisions without real-world consequences (Oatley, 1999, 2002).

Extending Piaget’s work regarding developmental frameworks and the formal operational stage—more specifically abstract thinking and moral reasoning (Piaget, 1972)—Kohlberg (1984) suggested a more hierarchical nature to moral development. This framework encompasses a preconventional stage, where morality develops to avoid punishment and is focused on reciprocal personal gain; a conventional stage, where morality is utilized for social acceptance and to preserve law and order; and a final postconventional stage, where morality is co-opted by universal ethics (e.g., rights and democracy) and abstract principles of justice. Fiction often displays situations in which abstract principles of justice come into play, for example, when a character does something bad for a higher good (Zillmann, 2000). The critique of Kohlberg’s model is its lack of focus on cultural and emotional variation (Shweder et al., 1987). As an alternative, Carol Gilligan’s *ethics of care* emphasize a moral development that is primarily founded in relationships, empathy, and a responsibility to others (Gilligan, 1982). Fiction often represents relational and emotional dilemmas, which in turn could resonate with adolescent themes of family, peers, and belonging (Hoffman, 2000).

Jonathan Haidt’s work extends Carol Gilligan’s centrality on emotion, describing that empathy, guilt, shame, or anger at injustice guides moral evaluation (Haidt, 2001; Haidt & Joseph, 2004). At times of deep emotional volatility, adolescents learn to feel their way through moral situations, deepening moral sensitivity. This, in turn, helps explain why some adolescents are so emotionally sensitive to immorality. (Casey et al., 2008; Hoffman, 2000; Steinberg, 2014). Fiction frequently evokes emotion through narrative empathy, designing stories that actively nurture emotional connection with the consumer (Coplan, 2006; Mar & Oatley, 2008).

Sometimes, narratives are utilized to reframe or justify immorality. Bandura's (1999) concept of moral disengagement in media explains that fiction can act as a cautionary tale, or it can normalize and even celebrate acts of transgression. Adolescents might be judgmentally lenient or even legitimize certain behaviors within narrative, depending on identification, meaning they could be flexible in judging a violent character if the violence is deemed necessary (Green & Brock, 2000; Zillmann, 2000). This last example leads into our final point of discussion.

A recurrent theme in adolescence is whether it is acceptable to break rules for higher goals. Fictional examples of this theme are frequently embedded in superhero stories and in young adult dystopias (e.g., *The Hunger Games*), whether it is the example of a vigilante against the law or a rebellion that fights against an unjust system (Zillmann, 2000; Blackburn, 2018). As discussed earlier in this passage, adolescence is fundamentally a period of transition—such transition requires negotiation on the part of adolescents in order to become fully functioning adults (Erikson, 1968; Steinberg, 2014).

A portion of that negotiation is with morality, sifting through it in search of a more stable sense of identity (Kohlberg, 1984). To this aim, fiction can be utilized as a psychological tool to engage with moral negotiation (Mar & Oatley, 2008; Oatley, 1999).

As is often the case, fictional identification occurs at developmental turning points, usually when adolescents are in the process of assimilating aspects of their past, present, and future (Green & Brock, 2000). Over time, they return to fictional content they once connected with, providing new reflections and interpretations of moral meaning on this renewed encounter (McAdams, 1993).

## **7. Recognition, Belonging, and Representation**

Mainly, adolescents have a deep desire to feel seen, mirrored, and recognized in both real and fictional spaces. Fiction and media can provide ways to soothe these desires by symbolically mirroring them (Hall, 1997; hooks, 1992).

The desire to be recognized is deeply reflected in adolescence's search for identity. Recognition—which means being acknowledged and respected—is intrinsic and fundamental to building self-confidence, self-respect, and self-esteem. Those who do not feel recognized do not feel seen, which bolsters feelings of invisibility, marginalization, and even shame (Honneth, 1995; hooks, 1992). The process of consolidating identity depends on the active

role of peers and society. In this case, the *milieu* is fundamental, in the sense that individuals define themselves by their group membership. Nonetheless, when the social environment is lacking or absent, narratives and fictional characters can be alternative sources for the recognition adolescents deeply crave (Erikson, 1968; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Hall, 1997; Oatley, 1999).

Essentially, recognition is upheld by validation and representation; without them, there is no affirming identity. Representation makes identity visible, belonging provides validation to said identity; both support recognition as the broader process of consolidating identity (Honneth, 1995; Hall, 1997; Baumeister & Leary, 1995). According to Hall (1997), representation is the production of meaning through language, images, and narratives. This definition implies that representation is not just the intention to reflect reality but also to shape it. Media frequently presents a wide spectrum of representations, both offering positive depictions of marginalized groups and simultaneously feeding into negative stereotypes. As a response to negative representations, audiences develop an *oppositional gaze* toward dominant narratives, critiquing them as a way to affirm themselves (Hall, 1997; hooks, 1992). Adolescents develop a similar attitude by using fictional characters to negotiate how they are represented, as opposed to how they wish to be seen. Through fictional identification, adolescents reject what they deem to be harmful or stereotypical portrayals, while at the same time encouraging the development of identity agency (Oatley, 1999; Cohen, 2001; Honneth, 1995; Bandura, 2001)

Homi Bhaba's (1994) theory of identity development, which features hybridity as a counter-argument to fixed and homogenous views of identity, mentions the concept of a "third space": a metaphorical in-between space where cultural identities negotiate. The purpose of the "third space" is to destabilize binaries and to create opportunities for resistance and redefinition of identity (Bhabha, 1994). Specifically within ethnic identity development, affirmation and belonging are crucial components of identity formation, in the sense that belonging provides connection with one's group, and affirmation directs positive feelings toward the same (Phinney, 1990; Baumeister & Leary, 1995). For bicultural adolescents, fiction can sometimes be a source of discomfort due to absent or inadequate representations, repressing potential sources of affirmation and belonging thereby removing fiction and media's ability to facilitate identity consolidation. In contrast, if fictional worlds are able to adequately reflect the dual identities of bicultural teens—providing a space for bicultural

negotiation—then they facilitate a path towards cultural integration of identity (Hall, 1997; Berry, 1997; Phinney, 1990; Bhabha, 1994; Oatley, 1999).

The ability for fiction to create a feeling of belonging with its consumer is nothing short of a significant aspect to consider. Belonging in adolescence is the perception of being accepted, respected, included, and supported by others in a social environment (Allen & Kern, 2017). Through the fictional portrayal of peer and social dynamics—as in familial friendship groups or fantastical teamwork scenarios—fiction mirrors the importance of peer relations in adolescence; becoming an additional space where they can rehearse and reflect on these dynamics (Brown & Larson 2009). Conclusively, fictional representation functions as a symbolic mirror that validates identity and, simultaneously, silences aspects that adolescents wish to repudiate (Hall, 1997; hooks, 1992).

## **8. Family, Control, and Expectation in Fictional Narratives**

Throughout this corpus, we have briefly mentioned or discussed in depth some of the externalities of identity development—externalities meaning aspects outside of the individual that influence development. A variety of credible authors in psychology mention family as the most fundamental externality, functioning as the primary system where individuals develop autonomy and emotional growth (Bowen, 1978; Minuchin, 1974; Steinberg & Silk, 2002). For adolescents, the development of autonomy is regulated by the push for independence; as a response, families attempt to renegotiate the relational bonds that were formed in the past. The shifting dynamic of pushing for personal freedom and pulling for relationship attachment commonly increases conflict and disagreement in familial contexts (Steinberg & Morris, 2001; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Arnett, 1999). Fiction often parallels these contexts by actively simulating this frictional dynamic within narratives, providing adolescents with alternative perspectives about their own family (Oatley, 1999; White & Epston, 1990).

Family itself has a hierarchical nature—some families are more rigid towards hierarchy, others are more fluid—both having pathological consequences if taken to the extreme (Bowen, 1978; Minuchin, 1974). Part of regulating a hierarchical structure, involves mastering the dimension of control. Parents usually manage the autonomy of their child through the use of behavioral and psychological control. Behavioral control can be structurally adaptive and contextually responsive, while psychological control—taking the form of guilt, intrusion, and coercion—is threatening to well-being and autonomy (Barber, 1996; Soenens & Vansteenkiste, 2010). Practically, autonomy supportive parenting supports competence and adjustment, while authoritarian parenting emphasizes hierarchical rigidity,

which fosters pathological compliance or resistance (Baumrind, 1991; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Steinberg & Silk, 2002).

The underlying structure of the conflict between adolescents and their parents, is essentially a struggle between autonomy and control. Even if parental control is not pathological, it can still create or communicate pressure—control implies pressure. It often comes in the form of expectations: parents communicate standards of performance, behavior, and life choices that shape the adolescent's self-image (Steinberg & Morris, 2001; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). The internalization of expectations can materialize as perfectionism, especially if perfectionism is a cultural value, as is the case in East Asian countries. The consequences of excessive expectations are deeply impactful, manifesting in anxiety and shame, and ultimately resulting in a strained relationship with kin (Chang, 1998; Pomerantz & Wang, 2009; Flett & Hewitt, 2002). The mediation of expectations is not uniquely influenced by cultural differences; gendered roles can also shape expectations for both sons and daughters, as do intergenerational discrepancies between parental values and adolescent aspirations. Additionally, siblings play a fundamental role in negotiating many of these aspects, functioning as models of comparison and partnership, and shaping empathy, rivalry, and alliance (Chodorow, 1978; Fuligni et al., 1999; Dunn, 1983; Selman, 1980).

Fiction acts as a space to externalize and reframe the family tensions that have been described. Fictional stories possess this ability because, in some ways, they are distant; they allow the subject to displace their own struggles onto characters or archetypes, facilitating the analytical distance needed for reflection (White & Epston, 1990). In the face of authoritarian parental control, adolescents, through the use of identification, can hypothesize and act out new strategies to deal with their rigid parents (Cohen, 2001; Green & Brock, 2000). In the absence of an adequate and empathetic parental presence, fictional characters can function as symbolic mentors or even sources of emotional comfort, doing so through parasocial interaction (Horton & Wohl, 1956). Through the use of redemptive and hopeful narratives, adolescents develop strategies to cope with issues of rebellion, negotiation, and reconciliation, giving them an active way to navigate expectations. In the end, fiction possesses the ability to reframe, to calm inner conflict, and to normalize the ways in which adolescents wish to express themselves (McAdams, 1993; Oatley, 1999).

## **9. Symbolism, Metaphor, and Aesthetic Dimensions**

One of—if not the main—constraint we face in exploring this topic, is that the word fiction itself implies something that is essentially not true. If it is not true, then how are we

able to explore it? How do we begin to understand fiction's potential impact on adolescence? One way to answer this question is to recognize that fiction not only operates on literal representation but also on symbolic amplification (Walton, 1990; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Jung, 1969). Metaphor and symbolism matter in these discussions, as they facilitate the externalization of abstract feelings. Psychological subjectivity in its rawest form requires guise to be understood: it requires an external form, appearance, or manner of presentation that organizes or even precipitates self-reflection (Barthes, 1993; Nussbaum, 1990; Ricoeur, 1984; McAdams, 1993). Consequently, this section intends to explore how symbolism, metaphor, and aesthetics deepen fictional identification and emotional resonance.

The idea of metaphor is not solely utilized for linguistic purposes; it is structurally embedded within thought and perception (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Kövecses, 2002). Metaphors allow individuals to grasp deeper conceptual meanings by making them more accessible. They do so by tracing a coherent path between a *source* that is concrete and objective, and a *target* that is complex and abstract (Kövecses, 2010). For example, adolescence is a concrete, familiar, and bodily experience—the source, per se—in the sense that it encompasses objective changes in biology and emotion (Erikson, 1968; Steinberg, 2014). These changes are accompanied by difficult concepts to grasp, such as independence, love, time, and the future. Through the use of metaphor, adolescents can paradoxically address these complex concepts directly, doing so by framing this period of development as a journey, a battle, or a transformation (McAdams, 1993; Turner, 2017). Fiction metaphorically mirrors adolescence, by depicting superhero stories that act as metaphors for dual lives, or through antihero journeys that reflect ambiguity and unconventionality (Jung, 1969; Oatley, 1999; Mar & Oatley, 2008). Fiction thus acts as a translator of sorts between source and target, organizing experience by turning the abstract into the concrete (Bruner, 1990; Ricoeur, 1984).

The exploration of the “abstract” moves the discussion to the topic of symbols. Essentially, symbols are representations of something abstract, something immaterial, something that belongs to the realm of thought (Cassirer, 1944; Eliade, 1991). Jung (1969) extensively discussed symbols in the conception of the *collective unconscious*: the deep layer of human psyche predicated upon universal symbolic patterns that precipitate the formation of archetypes. Archetypes are recurrent themes that transcend cultures in myth, fairy tale, religion, and story (Campbell, 2004). Examples of key archetypes include the hero, who goes on an impossible journey; the shadow, which is the dark and repressed side of the self; and the anima/animus, which represents the inner opposite side of gender within the self (Jung, 1969).

In the midst of identity formation, adolescents project their struggles onto archetypal figures. This occurs, for example, when they see a hero transcend his own inadequacies, symbolically mirroring the adolescent's transition into adulthood; or when they identify with shadow-like figures, through which they can articulate and represent feelings of anger, temptation, and rebellious urges. (McAdams, 1993; Jung, 1969; Oatley, 1999).

For Barthes (1957/1993), symbols are ways in which culture takes ordinary things and transforms them into deeper meaning—essentially turning them into myth. This works by turning everyday cultural symbols into mythical narratives that carry hidden ideological meaning. For example, Superman is not simply a symbol of heroism; he is a god who symbolizes the myth of omniscient moral clarity and the prevail of good over evil (Eco, 1986; Reynolds, 1992). Teens continually consume myths in movies, music, and media in general—even if they do amplify psychological struggle through the use of symbolism. Stories do this by portraying universal aspects of human emotional experience (Oatley, 1999; Mar & Oatley, 2008). Yet, it is precisely the symbolic amplification of psychological struggles that allows adolescents to gain a sense of distance from the emotional intensity of direct confrontation, that simultaneously enables them to indirectly reflect on their own personal struggles (Green & Brock, 2000; Nussbaum, 1990).

The emotional intensity of metaphor and symbol is somewhat mediated by aesthetics, in the sense that aesthetics—meaning visuals, music, atmosphere, and actors' performances—is the way in which fiction not only “*tells*” but also “*shows*” and “*feels*”. Transportation theory suggests that aesthetic features facilitate absorption in fictional worlds, with elements such as color and soundtrack deepening emotional resonance. For example, research shows that red is often associated with passion or anger, while blue conveys calmness or sadness (Valdez & Mehrabian, 1994). By making it an aesthetic and sensorial experience, fiction intensifies the emotional uptake of symbolism and metaphor (Cohen, 2001; Oatley, 1999).

To summarize—metaphor, symbols, and aesthetics—represent relevant dimensions to adolescence and fictional identification, underpinning both as metaphorical transformations.

### CHAPTER III : THEORETICAL POSITIONING

The vital function of the previous background section was to undertake a critical and theoretical exploration of the research title. What was understood throughout this process, is that beneath all of the highlighted themes, there exists a sense of disjointedness. Even if the elements are closely or even directly linked, there is an absence of a grand theory that binds them all together in a single coherent thought. As a consequence, if not properly addressed, the present research falls prey to scientific inaccuracy and lack of validity. As a response to this constraint, we direct the aim of the present section at constructing a theoretical path towards interpretation, tracing a logical bridge between intersecting theoretical traditions and epistemological/ontological assumptions that are central to the overarching view of this paper. In summation, we will converge this integrative intention on the view of four topics: adolescence, human beings, experience, and fiction.

Adolescence is fundamentally viewed as a threshold of existence—a liminal encounter with becoming, freedom and finitude heightened by the transition into adulthood. The onset of adolescence brings forth a general sense of insecurity, uprooting individuals and displacing them within their most fundamental spaces of living—leading them to thoroughly ponder on who they might become. These spaces—namely the three main tenets of lived experience: biological, psychological, and social—are questioned at their base and regularly reanalyzed. The current conception of adolescence as a developmental stage is theoretically rested on the basis of a biopsychosocial quality (Steinberg, 2014; Arnett, 2004). Biologically, adolescents face swift transitions at the hormonal and pubertal level, as well as general developments in cognition. The abruptness of these biological changes is also felt at the emotional level, leading to a heightened empathic sensibility that often makes emotions in adolescence feel more intense and distressing (Steinberg, 2014). All of these perceptible bodily changes cause inner turmoil, as they reveal the vulnerability of time and body that all humans are subjected to (Merleau-Ponty, 1962).

Psychologically, adolescents find themselves within an identity crisis—a crossroads of sorts—between forming a coherent identity that is capable of commitment without feeling a threat to the sense of self, and a state of role confusion that is essentially unable to do so (Erikson, 1968). Functioning as a backdrop to this process is the relationship the adolescent forms with exploration and commitment, meaning that the balance struck between both is

crucial to identity formation (Marcia, 1966, 1980). Perhaps this so-called “identity crisis” is maybe better understood as an existential confrontation, where the adolescent recognizes that the self is continually chosen and re-interpreted, rather than being discovered as an absolute. Nonetheless, both conceptions of identity stress fluidity as a conceptual pillar, describing the ability to advance and regress throughout time.

Cognitively, adolescents improve their general ability to think. More specifically, they improve their capacity to handle the abstract. As a result of wrestling with increasingly complex thoughts and ideas, moral reasoning will develop. From a developmental view, morality develops over three sequential stages: preconventional, conventional, and postconventional—gradually tracing a rational path from conditioned and undeveloped morality, to universal and agency-driven morality (Piaget, 1972; Kohlberg, 1984). Adolescents do not simply derive moral guidance from rationality; they do so by simultaneously reflecting on meaningful relationships and ethics of care (Gilligan, 1982). Adolescent morality is emotional—utilizing empathy, guilt, shame, or anger—as intuitive bases of judgement that guide moral evaluations (Haidt, 2001). From the existential point of view, moral awakening stems from the confrontation with responsibility and values—putting forth a state of moral consciousness that is no longer merely taught, but personally owned (Kierkegaard, 1843; Yalom, 1980).

Socially, the trend of transformation continues—even amplifies. Within the family, the negotiation of dependence and autonomy is a focal point of conflict, as are the expectations parents place upon their child (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Steinberg, 2014). Among peers, relationships are highly influential and central to self-affirmation, possessing the ability to either healthily or unhealthily promote development (Steinberg, 2014). Being with others in adolescence reflects a profound need to be seen, recognized, and mirrored in others, giving validity to the way one is (Buber, 1923/1970; Honneth, 1995).

Culturally, adolescents wish to find their place in the world, trying to understand what cultural “cut-offs” condition their expectations and projections (Arnett, 2000). This global and multidimensional view acknowledges that uncertainty and fluidity are the very essence of adolescent development—the only certainty being change itself.

Apart from being a fluid and transitional stage, adolescence is equally reframed as an existentially charged pursuit. It is not solely a process of unshackling from biological and

social constraints; it is also a deep desire to confront meaning, freedom, and authenticity (Yalom, 1980; van Deurzen, 2012). For the first time in their development, individuals begin to seriously and consciously consider their own limitations, questioning what it all means and seeking to explore how what came before will translate into what will come after.

The present view on human beings presupposes an initial and universal state of suffering that affects all psyches across countries, cultures, and generations (Frankl, 2006; Yalom, 1980). To confront the chaotic mess of existence, humans need to find ways to give meaning and purpose to their suffering; if not, they risk falling into a pit of passiveness and desperation (Kleinman, 1988). One of the cardinal ways to keep suffering at a distance, while simultaneously instilling meaning in experience, is through the human capacity to formulate narratives (Bruner, 1990; McAdams, 1993). Through narrative, humans are able to piece together the scattered aspects of their existence into a coherent and digestible form. The dispersed elements of lived experience require structure to develop, taking form in our thoughts, our memories, our culture, in fiction, and ultimately in our identity. In our thoughts, narrative is structured by framing reality as a human contextual story (Bruner, 1990). In our memory, narrative unconsciously forms through the concept of emplotment, meaning that retrospective thinking is story-dependent rather than solely reliant on fact or single events (Ricoeur, 1992). Culture breeds narrative through the propagation of myths, stories, and archetypes that remain vividly present—consciously or unconsciously—within our minds (Campbell, 2004; Jung, 1969). They do so, by containing storied elements that traverse the breadth of time—not bound to a single moment but instead carrying the continuously growing wisdom of past generations. In fiction, the essential elements of our thoughts, our memories, and our culture’s ancient stories are mirrored and represented in narrated form (Oatley, 1999). Eventually, the intersection between thoughts, memories, culture, and fiction converges on identity. Narrative identity is then the fundamental result of trying to find meaning in existence, essentially explaining “who I am,” “where I come from,” and “where I am going” through an internalized and evolving story (McAdams, 1993).

The ability for life stories to evolve is crucial to the concept of narrative, being that—in line with the developmental view of adolescence—identity is not static but ever-evolving. Some characteristics of identity are grounded in stable traits and continuity, giving individuals a sense of self-recognition across time. Other characteristics are embedded with

the capacity for change. Thus, identity is viewed as an interpretative process that is perpetually unfinished and continuously reconfigured through the use of narrative (Habermas & Bluck, 2000; McAdams, 2001). Essentially, this view and theoretical positioning of human beings assumes three principles: that humans cannot be understood outside their capacity to emplot experiences into stories, that their identity is dynamic and evolving, and that fiction and autobiography are two planes of narrative construction.

The core stance on the experience of the self rests on the supposition that reality is absorbed through the medium of interpretation, rather than a structured, segmented, and objective conglomerate of facts. Nietzsche stated, “There are no facts, only interpretations” (1887/1967). In this way, reality is co-constructed by the way we interpret events, symbols, and experiences. Humans do not base their perception on the careful and empirical analysis of objective facts; they base it on a framework of human interpretation (Ricoeur, 1984). Subsequently, from a phenomenological and hermeneutical perspective, reality is constructed by subjective experience—hence our later focus on the use of IPA methodology to explore individual reality.

Tying together the present conception means acknowledging that humans are storytelling animals who weave the raw data of experience into coherent narrative (Bruner, 1990). Underlying this metaphorical weaving process is symbolic mediation. Both metaphor and symbol signify a direct path toward putting forth the monumental, complex, and abstract elements of existence into simplified and concrete matter (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Cassirer, 1944). Archetypes also play a role in the mediation of reality, as they are collective unconscious patterns of existence—representative of symbolic pillars of psychological reality—that stand the test of time by reappearing continuously and cross-culturally throughout universal lived experience (Jung, 1969). Thus, symbols and metaphors are practical ways of turning abstract feelings into tangible form.

Fundamentally, we have established that interpreting reality is a subjective experience in addition to positing that humans do not live in facts but in stories. Both hypotheses point to the inclusion of fiction as a potential tool for interpretation, since fiction is, in essence, a symbolic reality. Experience through fiction implies a willingness to envelop oneself in a fictional world, as well as a deep emotional and sensorial engagement with the same. Experiencing a fictional world as similar to lived experience implies that the subject is

either immersed, present, embodied, or engaged in a powerful combination of all three within that world.

Immersion promotes lived experience in a fictional world by transporting the user, focusing all of their emotional and cognitive attention into a slight sense of trance—a flow state—that allows for profound absorption (Green & Brock, 2000; Ryan, 2001). Presence adds to this general feeling of transportation by encompassing spatial, social, and self-presence, which together promote the feeling of “being there” (Slater & Wilbur, 1997; Lombard & Ditton, 1997). At present, as a working assumption, we view presence as primarily phenomenological, following the trend of highlighting subjective experience as the primary mode of engagement with fiction (Lee, 2004; Riva et al., 2007). Embodiment sends the consumer into another dimension of fictional experience, tracing a clearer and more well-defined integration between subject and fiction (Calleja, 2011; Klimmt et al., 2009). Embodiment is where boundaries begin to fade—even cross over—potentially causing a more potent experience that endures and spills into non-fictional reality (Yee & Bailenson, 2007).

As a result, the comprehensive assumption about experience is that it is always structured through perception, narrative, and symbol; that fictional experience is not less real but instead carries phenomenological weight; and that individuals can process experience within fictional and symbolic reality.

Finally, our current view on fiction is that it stands as a possible testing ground of symbolic and experimental proportions, offering a safe space for identity work (Oatley, 1999; White & Epston, 1990). Fictional identification is an extension of this idea: a more detailed and specific way of articulating the self through fiction. The theoretical distinction between identifying with a fictional world and a fictional character is nuanced and requires further explanation.

Fictional identification with a character, as outlined, is a cognitive, emotional, and motivational adoption of a character’s perspective (Cohen, 2001; Oatley, 2002; Green & Brock, 2004). As a guiding proposition, fictional identification will be approached from an emotional, motivational, and cognitive foundation, since the conscious and unconscious nature of identification makes it a deeply lived experience as well as a rational one.

Identification with a fictional world places greater emphasis on feeling transported and absorbed by the fictitious world: where the subject is not directly linking with a character

per se, but with their overall lived experience within fictional reality (Green & Brock, 2000). Fiction then operates on two symbolic planes: the character plane, where identification blurs self/other boundaries, enabling adolescents to feel and think through the character (Cohen, 2001); and the world plane, where immersion into fictional settings provides cultural, moral, and existential spaces for experimenting with roles and values (Ryan, 2001). Nonetheless, both planes have the theoretical ability to mingle with each other and even to cross over, merging in the form of a powerful subjective experience.

Fiction possibly offers adolescents—at a pivotal stage of transition—a symbolic “sandbox” that simultaneously provides recognition, representation, and reflective distance (Hall, 1997; hooks, 1992; Honneth, 1995). Within this space, they can potentially test possible roles and futures, articulate moral dilemmas through the hypothetical negotiation of values, and reframe tensions with friends, family, and the broader world (McAdams, 1993; Oatley, 1999). In this way, fiction functions not as a series of separate benefits but as a unified symbolic process that amplifies meaning and supports identity formation.

The next and final step is to bind all four assumptions—adolescence, human beings, experience, and fiction—into one coherent theoretical stance. First, we began by laying the foundation of adolescence as a developmental-existential threshold, founded on the principle that identity is fluid and receptive to transformation. We then described human beings as storied selves, the result of identity and meaning converging through the use of narrative interpretation. Next, we proposed experience as interpreted and subjective, meaning it can be both mediated and symbolic. As a consequence, fiction is able to provide “as-if” experiences that carry phenomenological weight. Ultimately, we arrive at fiction as a cultural and symbolic playground where adolescents can safely negotiate identity, morality, recognition, and belonging.

Making fiction a component of analysis is based on two premises: its ability to metaphorically amplify human struggles and its potential to be a safe space for exploring identity. This dissertation proceeds from the view that fictional identification in adolescence is not a trivial pursuit but an existentially relevant practice. All four assumptions form the interpretative ground for subsequent IPA analysis and discussion. In line with the epistemological stance of this dissertation, data will be treated as interpretative constructions that reveal how adolescents use fiction as a resource for identity formation.

## CHAPTER IV : METHODOLOGY

### 1.1 Research Design - Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

The selected method of choice for exploring the topic under research is the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). IPA was primarily chosen as the research design because it is a qualitative, phenomenological, and ideographic approach that is primarily developed within the field of psychology (Smith et al., 2009). Also very relevant to the methodical suppositions of the present study, is IPA's integral aim of exploring how individuals make sense of significant lived experiences (Eatough & Smith, 2017). IPA is adequately selected because this study intends to explore how adolescents experience and interpret their relationship with fictional identification, more specifically, how they make meaning of their engagement with fictional characters and worlds. Simultaneously, a research design based on an IPA methodology allows for idiographic depth, emphasizing the importance of detailed and individual attention before moving to the analysis of collective patterns (Smith et al., 2009). At the same time, it enables a heightened sensitivity towards potential nuance, affection, and cognitive processing that could be involved in fictional identification. Plus, it is not methodically rigid, being flexible and dynamic enough to accommodate the complexity of individual experience—hence the ability to tackle complex topics like identity, recognition, belonging, and morality within the same project (Smith, 2011). By prioritizing the voices of the participants, IPA allows us to bring the adolescent's experiential world to the center of analysis, this being the anchoring space of—essentially—the rigor and credibility of our study (Smith et al., 2009).

Theoretically, an IPA analysis is phenomenological by nature, since it seeks to understand lived experience from the participant's perspective. Meaning, subjectivity is central to its theoretical positioning (Smith et al., 2009). IPA is also hermeneutic, emphasizing interpretation as the focal point of analysis. Although it is more accurate to state IPA as double hermeneutic: on the one hand, having participants engaged in a first-order process of attempting to make sense of their own experience; and on the other, having researchers engaged in a second-order process whereby they attempt to make sense of the participants' sense-making (Smith & Osborn, 2015). This dynamic creates a layered and comprehensive interpretation, subsequently enriching the analysis. As a way to ground itself in theoretical and

empirical principles, an IPA analysis is idiographic, only allowing for interpretation of group themes after the detailed analysis of each individual case (Smith et al., 2009).

Referring to epistemological assumptions, IPA is positioned in rejection of positivist views of a single objective reality. Instead, it is anchored in a critical realist perspective in-between naïve realism and strong relativism (Bhaskar, 1975/2008; Willig, 2013). Naïve realism assumes we can see the world directly and objectively—as is. Strong relativism/constructivism says there is no inherent meaning, theorizing instead that the world is the lone result of social constructions and interpretations. Critical realism acknowledges the real world by admitting the existence of events, objects, and experiences, but simultaneously stating we never possess direct and uninterpreted access to it (Bhaskar, 1975/2008). We always encounter reality through the lens of perception, culture, and interpretation (Willig, 2013). Finally, this means that reality is co-constructed by the researcher and the participant, enabling the researcher’s preconceptions to shape interpretation but also to deepen insight (Smith et al., 2009; Eatough & Smith, 2017).

## **1.2 Participants**

The present investigation included eight adolescent participants, all enrolled in the 11th year of high school and ranging in age from 16 to 17 years. The sample consisted of five females and three males. All participants were students at an international school and reflected diverse cultural backgrounds: one American (Madison), one English/Argentinian (Isabella), one South African (Nathan), one Mozambican/Portuguese (Ana), one German/Spanish/Palestinian (Omar), one Mexican/American (Sofia), one Chinese (Xiaohua), and one Dutch (Dann).

To be included in this study, participants were required to be within the developmental window of adolescence, specifically within a stipulated age range of 15 to 18 years old. This developmental stage was initially selected because it coincides with middle to late adolescence, a stage broadly considered pivotal in the construction of identity, the exploration of moral and existential questions, and the heightened engagement with fictional media as a reflective tool. In practice, however, the effective age of participants was narrowed to 16 to 17 years old, due to restrictions set in collaboration with the school, since recruitment was limited to students enrolled in the 11th academic year.

A further inclusion criterion was linguistic ability: all participants were required to demonstrate sufficient fluency in either Portuguese or English, ensuring they could both understand the prompts and articulate their experiential accounts with nuance. In addition, participants were expected to be willing and open to discussing their subjective relationship with fiction, since the methodological approach relied on detailed personal reflections.

Exclusion criteria was equally defined to preserve both the ethical integrity of the project and the validity of the data. Mainly, those that had no initial affinity to fictional content or medium were instantly excluded—that being an axiom of investigation. Additionally, participation was barred in any instance where the school raised concerns over participants that were not keeping up with academic responsibilities.

Recruitment was conducted progressively, it started by an initial 10 minute presentation to all year 11 classes, explaining the overall structure of the investigation and a general overview of the interview process. During the presentation, the relationship with fiction was central and explained as the crucial selective criteria. Afterwards, a digital QR code was displayed on the board, leading to a questionnaire designed to appraise interest of participation and superficial connection to fictional content. Once the questionnaires were completed by a substantial sum of participants, selection was dependent on two specific criteria: expressing the desire to participate, and perceiving a personal connection to characters or fictional worlds. Eventually, after a discussion with the school regarding the eligibility of certain proposed students, an email was sent informing participants of admission, along with the consent forms to their respective guardians. Once they were signed, the time and location of the interview was scheduled.

In alignment with the methodological commitments of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), the final sample size consisted of eight participants (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). This number falls within the typical range for IPA, which prioritizes idiographic depth over statistical generalization (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). The decision to maintain a small sample was made to allow for detailed, case-by-case analysis, where each adolescent's experiential world could be explored in depth before considering patterns across cases (Smith et al., 2009). While the limited sample size necessarily constrains the generalizability of the findings, it simultaneously enhances the richness and nuance of the

accounts collected, placing emphasis on the interpretative depth and lived reality of participants rather than on representativeness (Eatough & Smith, 2017; Smith et al., 2009).

### **1.3 Data Collection**

The interview process began by selecting a type of interview intended on highlighting an adequate level of depthness and vulnerability from the adolescent. At the same time, it was very important to promote participant flexibility and agency in conducting the interview, so as to get an accurate and honest account of their lived experience. With that in mind, a phenomenologically oriented semi-structured interview was selected (e.g. what aspects of their character made you relate to them?). The inherent versatility of this type of approach allowed participants to touch upon the key themes, while at the same time, opening the space for nuanced and subjective expression.

One of the conditional aspects set by the school was the location of the interviews, as we were not allowed to meet students outside of school grounds. To this, we were given a room slightly adjacent to the terrace area that allowed for adequate privacy and silence. On average, the interviews lasted between 35 to 45 minutes, depending on how extensive and descriptive the participants were. Before the interviews began, each participant was required to present the consent forms signed by themselves and their legal guardians. Once those were validated, the introductory conversation between researcher and participant followed. Prior to the official start of the interview, participants were reminded that the intention was not for them to provide correct answers but to attempt to be as faithful to personal experience as possible, as well as being informed that they could end their participation at any time. All interviews were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed for analysis, ensuring accurate capture of participants' accounts.

### **1.4 Analytical Process**

The analysis conducted followed the principles of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as outlined by Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009). As follows, I committed to idiographic depth by analyzing each case individually, and to interpret analysis by making sense of the participants' sense-making (Smith et al., 2009). The first step of analysis involved reading and re-reading the transcripts. Doing so allowed me to be immersed in the participants' voices (Smith et al., 2009). Simultaneously, I listened to the audio recording and

made annotations that marked the tone, pauses, and emotional nuance of the participants' words (Eatough & Smith, 2017). Once transcription was placed within the table template that IPA requires, the second step commenced. In concert, quotes that were deemed vivid, representative, and experiential were chosen, and exploratory notes were then written on either margin of the digital page (Smith & Osborn, 2015). These short sentences contained descriptive notes that transformed what was being said into concrete and experiential content. Linguistic notes accounted for contextual aspects like language choice, metaphors, repetitions, and pauses that the participants made; and conceptual notes brought a more inquisitive and interpretative light to a still probing tone (Smith et al., 2009). With the conclusion of the second step, I began to develop emergent themes, which constituted the third level of an IPA analysis. This involved condensing the exploratory notes into concise experiential statements, which intend to capture the central psychological meaning of sections of the text (Smith et al., 2009). As a researcher, it was fundamental to balance the participant's voice with the interpretative intention (Smith, 2011).

When this step was finished and experiential statements were formulated, I began to search for connections across the emergent themes. This means that I grouped themes into conceptual clusters, developing Personal Experiential Themes (PETs) in the process (Smith et al., 2009). Once all of these steps were followed in each participants interview, I moved on to the next case and continued to consistently and ethically re-apply the same exact principles that were described. The commitment to idiography means that each case needed to be analyzed independently before making a comparison with other interviews (Smith et al., 2009). By adhering to these conditions, each participant's contribution was treated as unique in meaning-making matter.

In the end, when all interviews were individually analyzed, I moved to a more overarching level of analysis by looking for patterns across all cases. This meant identifying the aspects in which participants converged and diverged (Eatough & Smith, 2017). Following the pattern of the fourth step of an IPA analysis, PETs were subsequently turned into Group Experiential Themes (GETs)—representing collective experiential patterns while still maintaining individual nuance. Recurrence was evaluated experientially rather than statistically, supported by a PET-to-GET matrix linking idiographic themes to group patterns (Smith et al., 2009; Smith & Osborn, 2015).

## **1.5 Ethical Considerations**

Consent procedures followed a two-tier approach: where parents or guardians provided written consent after reviewing the details of the study, and adolescents themselves provided verbal and written consent of the same. The overall process continuously reemphasized the agency on the part of the subject and the voluntary nature of participation, with students being clearly informed that their involvement was not obligatory and could be withdrawn at any point without consequence. These tenets were highly emphasized since the intent was to breed trust and transparency between interviewer and participant.

The extracted data from the collection of interviews was handled with extreme care and ethical conduct. Interviews were recorded using a personal mobile phone, with access strictly limited to the owner of the device. The recordings were posthumously transcribed using transcribing software, followed by the researcher's individual analysis of said translation as to ensure consistency, reliability, and to preserve the uniqueness of individual expression. Audio will be deleted after two years, and pseudonym used transcripts will be retained per institutional policy.

## **1.6 Reflexivity and Quality Assurance**

As the researcher, I remained consciously aware of my role in interpretation, putting into practice the principle of double-hermeneutics. This meant that through the constant re-analysis of the transcripts, I made sure to reflect on my assumptions and my emotional responses—always staying grounded by the idiographic principles and the willingness to keep individual voice truthful. Nonetheless, I need to acknowledge that the instinctual need to formulate patterns before collective assessment did influence some aspects of the research. More specifically, it might have influenced some of the unconscious direction of my line of questioning; to mitigate this, I tried to be as non-directive as possible, seeking to let adolescents openly discuss their own interpretation of my arranged questions.

To ensure methodological rigor, each analytical step was carefully documented as a sort of audit trail, ensuring that every step was carefully organized and documented so as to not lose the coherent thread. In addition, interpretations were constantly double-checked with the interview's audios, to maintain the much needed nuance and contextual frame of an IPA study.

## CHAPTER V: RESULTS / ANALYSIS

### 1.1 PERSONAL EXPERIENTIAL THEMES (PETs)

#### Case: Ana (17 years old)

Ana, a 17 year-old, describes fiction as a symbolic mirror of the search for authenticity and belonging, at a time where she was weary of falling prey to danger and temptation.

#### **Theme 1- Hauntings of the Future: Fiction as a Mirror of Adolescent Identity.**

- *“Maybe I was seeing a version of me in them... spiritually, I am becoming just as grey as them”*
- *“I could see myself kind of being trailed onto whatever the movie plot was...that was like a breaking point or warning”*

**Interpretation:** The fictional characters course towards dangerous lifestyles, highlighted her own possible selves and fears over who she might become if she stays on a similar path. Seeing the film throughout different stages of adolescence resonated as a warning, showing her a trajectory she feared.

#### **Theme 2 - Seen Through the Wildness: Craving Recognition and Belonging**

- *“I was trying to get what I never got years before...I kind of wanted that attention as much as I could”*
- *“I would try to put myself out there as as I could so people could see me...that’s the same as her”*

**Interpretation:** Through the character’s “wild” expressiveness, Ana glimpsed a version of herself that could finally be seen. Her imitation of these behaviors was less about rebellion and more about reclaiming visibility after years of marginalization. Fiction provided both the model and the justification for this transformation; an experiment in being recognized.

#### **Theme 3 - Dealing with Tracy: Negotiating Identity through Fictional Identification**

- *“She tried to be, like—the most, like, quirky almost, and I tried my best to be that way”*
- *“I wouldn’t say we’re polar opposites, but I’d say I’m really far from that”*

**Interpretation:** Ana’s engagement with Tracy oscillates between imitation and distance. She experiments with aspects of the characters expressive identity while resisting complete fusion. Fiction thus becomes a space of safe experimentation—a testing ground where she negotiates how far she can go in redefining herself.

**Case Summary:** Ana found a way to deal with the troubling aspects of adolescence by finding recognition and similarity in the spirit of Tracy’s character—serving as a reflective surface for negotiating who she might become.

**Case: Xiaohua (17 years old)**

Xiaohua, 17 years old, highlights the use of fiction to reflect on her cultural upbringing, and the pressures and frustrations that come with it.

**Theme 1 - Struggling Together: Relating to Characters Through Shared Experiences**

- *“I am also drawn to characters that I can relate to... Turning Red and the main protagonist is an Asian girl, and I can really relate to how she feels in her family.”*
- *“Because of the high expectations, Meilin isn’t showing the full of herself to her mom... For me, I think sometimes it is a problem of Asian parents.”*

**Interpretation:** Fiction validates lived experience by projecting personal struggles onto characters—especially cultural and familial struggles.

**Theme 2 - Perfect or Nothing: Parental Expectations, Perfectionism, and Fear of Failure**

- *“It feels like being perfect is kind of an ordinary thing. Like, if you try hard, you have to be perfect.”*
- *“When Meilin cannot meet some expectations... she just hides the exam papers. I think that also causes the children to become avoidant.”*

**Interpretation:** Perfection is the baseline parental expectation, resulting in extreme pressure and subsequent avoidance. Fictional metaphors (hiding exam papers) deeply resonate with her own experience of trying to conceal failure from her parents.

**Theme 3 - Turning Red: Fiction as Symbolic Expression of Inner Conflict**

- *“The part that she became a red panda, I think, is like a metaphor when she has strong feelings and the kind of inner conflict during teenage times.”*
- *“There was a time that her parents discovered she turned into a red panda, and then they just took everything out of her bedroom... That’s similar to me.”*

**Interpretation:** Her own stories of lived confinement and surveillance perpetrated by parental control accentuated her feelings of helplessness. Using the red panda metaphor to translate adolescent emotions allowed her to externalize inner turbulence.

**Case Summary:** The fictional experience shared with Meilin allowed Xiaohua to gain perspective over the autonomous and authenticity struggles she had with her family during puberty. Sharing such a similar cultural experience allowed Xiaohua to externalize and reflect on feelings of helplessness and frustration.

### **Case: Nathan (16 years old)**

Nathan, 16 years old, utilizes fictional identification with controversial character to negotiate aspects of the self.

#### **Theme 1 - Forging Will: Aspiration Identification with Ambition and Resilience**

- *“Frank Underwood is a benchmark for me to set my standard of character... ambition, determination, and the work ethic.”*
- *“I make the impossible into a possible. That’s the sort of person I’m going to become.”*

**Interpretation:** Character serves as benchmark for an ideal of personal will, perseverance, and ambition. Nathan adopts the character’s inspirational lines as personal mantras of possibility.

#### **Theme 2 - Wrestling with Morality: Fiction as Moral Testing Ground**

- *“Morally he’s corrupt, which is something I am not going to indulge in.”*
- *“I wouldn’t mind being controversial because the cause... would be much bigger than my lifespan.”*
- *“Whatever it takes in the right manner... calculate whether the outcome is worth your morality.”*

**Interpretation:** Ambivalent attraction to boldness, specifically fascinated with risk-taking and controversy if for a higher cause. Morality is abstractly defined, with character helping to negotiate moral development in examples of corruption and of “ends justify the means”.

#### **Theme 3 - Nathan Ends, Frank Begins: Integration of Fictional Traits into Self-Concept**

- *“When he speaks to an audience, people are drawn to what he says. That’s something I also admire.”*
- *“It influences the perspective from which I view things in the long term.”*
- *“Learning to adapt in certain situations when something doesn’t go to plan, but not be so ill prepared that everything is disordered.”*

**Interpretation:** Integrates fictional traits by emulating eloquence and persuasive speech, and by adopting an orientation toward future planning that integrates discipline into personal ethos. While also having a calculated and somewhat cold approach to reality.

**Case Summary:** Frank Underwood is seen by Nathan as an ideal identification, helping to negotiate self-concepts related to relationships, morality, ambition, and resilience. Although, Frank simultaneously symbolizes a shadow figure which seduces Nathan’s underlying omnipotent desires.

### **Case: Sofia (17 years old)**

Sofia, 17 years old, utilizes fiction as a comprehensive and reflective view of the past, present, and future. As well as, strongly identifying with female characters that represent her various facets.

#### **Theme 1 - My lifelong friend, Fiction: Fiction as a Mirror of Identity Development**

- *“Gabby makes me think about my future... Hermione makes me think about my past.”*
- *“She also kind of grew up in her series... when your characters can reflect that evolvment, it’s relatable.”*
- *“It’s kind of sad nostalgia... but also liberating because I can see myself reflected in so many other characters.”*

**Interpretation:** Sofia experiences characters’ as temporal companions of different life stages (past, present, future). They provide growth parallels were character development mirrors her own personal evolution. When moving on from earlier identifications, Sofia feels both sadness and freedom—a sense of significant loss yet, simultaneously, an opportunity for liberation.

#### **Theme 2 - My Heroines: Identification with Strong and Complex Female Characters**

- *“She was incredibly intelligent... I really enjoyed school just like she did.”*
- *“The heroine is... morally flawed... which makes her compelling and more reflective of real life.”*
- *“She was both smart and strong... adventurous, witty... more than just one [thing].”*

**Interpretation:** Hermione provided Sofia with opportunities to feel validated on her love of learning and her intelligence. Sofia identifies with flawed characters who combine intellect, physicality, strength, and wit, as long as they are authentic and versatile.

#### **Theme 3 - Costumed Self: Fiction as Embodiment and Performed Identification**

- *“On that day, we had the liberty to be whoever we wanted to be.”*
- *“If I was gonna be that character, I wanted to be as accurate to the book description as I could.”*
- *“Make it as tangible as possible that I almost am this person.”*

**Interpretation:** In youth, costumes allowed Sofia to temporarily “become” her favorite characters. As an expression of this desire, Sofia dressed up as authentically as possible, intensifying identification. In this way the fictional self was made real through embodied play.

**Case Summary:** Sofia developed her sense of identity in relation to a very strong identification with the fictional heroines she admired. They all provided the necessary balance between validation and ideal that is so essential in adolescence.

### **Case: Dann (16 years old)**

Dann, 16 years old, found fictional worlds to be spaces where he could freely immerse himself, nurturing his desire for adventure and exploration.

#### **Theme 1 - The Samurai Way: Fictional Worlds as Spaces for Immersion**

- *“I can keep going back to them... always something new.”*
- *“It really felt, as I was fighting, it felt like I was actually like a samurai.”*
- *“I try not to play the same way in every game. I try to play the game as it’s intended to play.”*

**Interpretation:** Replayability and novelty allow Dann to find new experiences within video games—continuously immersing himself, through the mediation of technology, in the feeling of embodying the character of a samurai. This process of role-taking occurs within narrative frames, as he plays characters according to their intended morality.

#### **Theme 2 - Building Discipline: Fictional Identification as a Source of Ideals and Values**

- *“Batman... he’s really well known for his dedication, for his work ethic. I think that’s something I probably would have taken from him.”*
- *“I was lazy... then I saw comics... this character has a lot of determination, he works a lot. That grew on me.”*
- *“Hajime no Ippo... if you put in the work, put in the hours, you get a reward.”*
- *“When I’m training, I think back to what that felt like... it motivates me to keep working hard. Perseverance.”*

**Interpretation:** Fictional heroes such as Batman and Ippo serve as moral templates, transforming laziness into determination. Their discipline and endurance become internalized as ideals, motivating him to work harder and persist through difficulty.

**Case Summary:** For Dann, fiction offers both adventure and direction. Immersing himself in samurai worlds and disciplined heroes like Batman and Ippo, he turns play into purpose, linking imagination with perseverance.

### **Case: Omar (16 years old)**

Omar, 16 years old, saw fiction as a way in which he could immerse himself, working through conceptions of morality and personal aspirations

#### **Theme 1 - With Great Power, Comes Great Responsibility: Morality and Ideals**

- *“Spider-Man... the big thing is great power, great responsibility... I should use it responsibly.”*
- *“We helped... her daughter and her parents... I feel like we have the responsibility to help them out.”*

**Interpretation:** Superhero’s like Spider-man shape guiding principles revolving around privilege, responsibility, and power. Such that, Omar’s moral framework is compelled by the duty to do good.

**Theme 2 - Growing Pressures: Characters as Mirrors of Adolescent Pressures**

- *“It’s always kind of the... Spider-Man... having a relationship with his aunt, having his friends, having to do well in school, having to fight crime, every day... it’s relatable.”*
- *“You feel like you have to meet not only your expectations, but of other people. And then, of course, that gets heavy. That’s a heavy life.”*

**Interpretation:** Relating to Spider-man is reflective of the balancing of multiple roles, such as school, friends, sports, expectations. All of these make Omar feel like he’s being pulled in many different directions, making adolescence feel overburdened.

**Case Summary:** The idea of being a “good guy” that wields his power responsibility and does good onto others is very present within Omar’s self-concept. His ideals are in turn shaped by the omniscient morality clarity embedded in the superhero ethos.

**Case: Madison (17 years old)**

Madison, 17 years old, saw her relationship with fiction as a fundamental part of her life, giving her the tools to articulate her thoughts in a self-determined manner.

**Theme 1 - Don’t put me in a Box: Representation and Relatability**

- *“So a lot of fiction and movies are geared towards men... I don’t think I’m being represented.”*
- *“On Disney Channel... the sassy black friend... the trope should not designate how you write a character.”*
- *“We all want to see ourselves on the big screen.”*

**Interpretation:** Madison dislikes being pigeonholed in fictional representation. She wishes to see herself represented in an authentic way; not the result of a stereotypical trope. Her desire to be seen through the fictional lens is central.

**Theme 2 - The Future Awaits: Fiction and Life Transitions**

- *“When you graduate high school... you kind of get flung into the real world. This is war.”*

- *“What am I going to do after university... will my expectation... be enough to maintain what reality throws at me?”*
- *“I have trouble doing things if I don’t think I’m going to succeed at them... I see that in her, and I see that in me.”*

**Interpretation:** Fiction mirrors the uncertainty of growing up, helping Madison frame education and adulthood as challenges to be faced. Through characters like Fang, she recognizes her own fears of failure and hopes for success, using fiction to make sense of transition and aspiration.

### **Theme 3 - The Anti-Hero: Identification with Morally Complex Characters**

- *“I relate to Fang Runin, and she’s a terrible character to relate to.” “You didn’t want her to be a bad person... but her relationships with her friends... she still really cares.”*
- *“You didn’t want her to be a bad person... but her relationships with her friends... she still really cares.”*
- *“She’s just so human. Like, I think all humans are a little bit crazy.”*

**Interpretation:** Madison resonates with flawed characters, finding self in shadow type figures. There is tension regarding discomfort for characters actions and their loyalty towards friends, holding connection despite destructive acts.

**Case Summary:** For Madison, fiction is both playground and mirror—a space where imagination, identity, and morality intertwine. Through complex, flawed characters, she explores emotion, accountability, and the transition into adulthood, using fiction as a reflective experiment to think, feel, and grow.

## **1.2 GROUP EXPERIENTIAL THEMES (GETs)**

After completing the idiographic analysis of each participant, we now shift our lens of focus toward the collective patterns that span the complete set of interviews. These Group Experiential Themes (GETs) capture the meaning and depth of the relationship adolescents share with fiction. While individual differences remain, these themes represent the points of convergence across all eight cases. Minor or more idiosyncratic GETs were noted but are not presented in full; instead, they appear in the annex section with finer detail (see Annex C for GET 5). Only the most conceptually rich and recurrent themes are presented directly, so as to preserve analytical depth and clarity. Additionally, GET numbering reflects the order of presentation in the text and does not indicate analytical hierarchy. Finally, it is necessary to stress that these themes are not described as sequential stages of development; they represent intersecting dimensions of a dynamic and interactive process.

## GET 1: Fiction as a Developmental Mirror of the Adolescent

---

This group experiential theme (GET) emerged through convergence across several participants' experiential accounts. For many, fictional narratives provided a reflective template of their development, functioning as a temporal mirror that traced their past, present, and future transitions. Through fiction's ability to reflect the past, adolescents found a way to revisit fiction as a temporal self-encounter.

---

*"As growing up, I can interpret the story in a different way... now I can understand the meaning and the analogy underneath strongly." (Xiaohua)*

*"The movie reminds me of my past, but it doesn't really influence my life now... before puberty I did as my parents said. But after a certain time, you develop your own thoughts and question some of the things they think." (Xiaohua)*

*When I first read it, I was also her age. So I saw myself reflected in that. But now that I am 17, it's kind of almost like I'm remembering everything and it's like, oh my gosh, I'm her age when the book series finished. I can see myself in her now." (Sofia)*

---

Through these encounters, fiction often became a reflective vessel, allowing adolescents to look backward and encounter their past selves through stories that had once shaped them—making conscious the presence of continuity in change. By reflecting the past, fiction often prompted adolescents to question their present selves. For some, these reflections highlighted how much they had changed, and how their current experiences marked a transition from who they were to who they were becoming.

---

*"It was becoming too much. I started thinking, if I don't leave now, I fear that I'll be one of them... so I decided to leave. And I think that's why I really like the movie — it shows how, like a curve, a big event can really change the course of your life." (Ana)*

*"She was always, like, a reserved girl... and I think that's where I wanted to be — I wanted to be that super outgoing, super crazy girl who knew everybody... that's not who I am." (Ana)*

*"Aileen left one of her lives behind because she needed to explore a different life... I left swimming, which was one of the facets of my life so that I could explore something else." (Sofia)*

*“Fang doesn’t really care about her past, but it was definitely a motivator to her future—it gave her her grit and her motivation to pursue what she wants.” “I see that in her, and I see that in me—just that grit to keep going and to aspire to be the best in whatever aspect or field you want to do.*

*“Maybe it was after that fight I had with my dad that the light came back... maybe this is the life I should be living.” (Ana)*

---

The characters’ transformations symbolized incremental passages in the adolescents’ lives, marking versions of the self in moments of departure, risk, and rebirth. In this sense, many participants saw their own symbolic adolescent turning points reflected in their beloved characters and stories. Alongside the ability to reflect on transition, fiction also mirrored the current struggles the adolescents faced—mainly the tension between trying to balance the responsibility of adolescence and the desire to remain present and youthful.

---

*I do a lot of activities outside of school... it’s a struggle to keep the balance... I can relate with Spider-Man.” (Dann)*

*“It’s always kind of the... Spider-Man... having a relationship with his aunt, having his friends, having to do well in school, having to fight crime, every day... it’s relatable.” (Omar)*

---

Participants described how fiction represented the pressure of living two different lives, externalizing their own negotiation with the increasing demands of adolescence. They often spoke about trying to balance their public and private selves, and the tension between duty and desire—a felt conflict between freedom and responsibility. Beyond reflecting the present and the past, fiction also mirrored the future by offering spaces to imagine who they might become and what kind of mark they wished to leave behind.

---

*“I mean, one of the lines he said was, I’m secretary house whip, I make the impossible into a possible. Which I find is just like, that’s the sort of person I’m going to become to make the impossible possible.” “Knowing that I had probably 0.001% chance being adopted... the fact that it was even me means... I can achieve anything.” “A lot of people share this dread which is to be forgotten. That’s one that I have.” (Nathan)*

*“Maybe I was seeing a version of me in them... spiritually, I am becoming just as grey as them.” (Ana)*

---

These stories of endurance and, at times, downfall expressed deep longings for continuity and remembrance, highlighting adolescents' desire to make an impact and to feel unique. In summation, Fiction as a Developmental Mirror of the Adolescent Self was a strongly echoed theme across several cases, reflecting the adolescents' evolving identity and their efforts to regain control over a changing sense of self. Taken together, these accounts illustrate how fiction operated as a developmental mirror, externalizing identity negotiation across time.

## **GET 2: Being Inside Fiction: Immersion and Embodiment**

---

For many participants, fiction was not merely observed but entered. Immersion was described as a lived, sensory event that blurred the line between perception and imagination.

---

*"Movies are just... It's so immersing, you feel like you're in the world." (Omar)*

*"I want to be able to see it and, like, feel it the same way that, like, I would if I was in that world." (Madison)*

*"The trailer was good because of the music... Frank Ocean." (Isabella)*

*"Even though I'm scared and I won't be able to sleep, it's worth finishing the movie because I'm curious." (Isabella)*

*"It really felt, as I was fighting, it felt like I was actually like a samurai." (Dann)*

---

Immersion became a felt reality—fiction entered through the body. Aesthetic details like sound and rhythm carried emotion into sensation, while curiosity and fear intertwined to heighten presence. For one participant, this sensory pull marked the threshold where imagination became physical.

---

*"On that day, we had the liberty to be whoever we wanted to be." (Sofia)*

*"If I was gonna be that character, I wanted to be as accurate to the book description as I could." (Sofia)*

*"Make it as tangible as possible that I almost am this person." (Sofia)*

---

Embodiment allowed this participant to become-other. Through imitation and feeling, fiction translated into action and strength. Identification moved beyond watching—it was lived through the body, restoring agency and possibility. For some, these attachments endured past the ending.

---

*“I get to a point where the character I adore, sadly leaves the series... so yeah, I just keep re-watching that series.” (Nathan)*

*“I can keep going back to them... always something new.” (Dann)*

*“Sort of as if you were a student following a mentor, in a way.” (Nathan)*

---

Re-watching was a way of staying connected—a return to characters who functioned as mentors or companions. Fiction became a relational space that could be revisited for continuity and comfort. Immersion also carried a sense of exploration.

---

*“The imagination is not utilized enough... that was the favorite part of, like, running around on a playground... someone else’s imagination—let’s take a tour.” (Madison)*

*“When I play video games, I like to explore, try and go everywhere.” (Dann)*

---

Imagination opened vast, unbounded spaces that invited discovery and movement. Fiction became a terrain to wander through freely—a space where curiosity and agency could unfold without constraint. In sum, immersion and embodiment reveal fiction as a continuum—from sensory absorption to transformation and shared creation. For these adolescents, to engage with fiction was to live inside it—feeling, becoming, and belonging through imaginative experience.

### **GET 3 - Fiction as an Ethical Sandbox: Consequences, Realism, and Ends/Means Tensions**

---

Participants often described fiction as a reflective space where they could safely imagine “what-if” scenarios during their development. Many of these imagined situations involved exploring questions of right and wrong, using fictional narratives to think through moral choices and their consequences. Through these reflections, fiction became what several adolescents described as an ethical sandbox—a symbolic space for testing values and negotiating moral conflict.

---

*Morally he’s corrupt, which is something I am not going to indulge in.” (Nathan)*

*“She’s an interesting thought piece... I would never replicate her actions, but she gives you something to think about.” (Madison)*

*Like, you're always—at least as a person—like, I'm always trying to figure out: am I doing the right thing? Is this the moral teaching I was taught, or is this a time when I have to decide: is this the right thing to do? And, like, if it is the wrong thing to do, but it's the necessary thing to do, is it still something I should be doing?" (Madison)*

*"To exist in today's world is to not be moral... you can't fight the system from within the system." (Madison)*

---

In this sense, participants could see the fictional consequences of the moral choices made by their chosen characters, giving them an opportunity to test integrity and moral boundaries without real-life risk. Although the situations were imagined, this absence of actual risk did not prevent adolescents from reflecting on the weight of consequence and responsibility—which they often did.

---

*"Because it's actually like, oh yeah, I did well here. Now I get this as a reward. Whereas if I did something bad, it's like, oh no, I messed this up. And then the character suffers from it. And it's like, well, I kind of messed that up. I should probably try to fix that in the future." "I think that having consequences helps me relate more to the character." (Dann)*

*"With Invincible, it's far more realistic... he gets super injured, and then he can't do certain things." (Omar)*

*"The reason why it was, like, jokingly funny is because consequences happen. And that's actually one thing I really like about this writer — the consequences are always realistically tied. Any action any character takes has a consequence, and it doesn't feel like they ever escape it, which is real, and happens in real life." (Madison)*

---

Participants described how the visible consequences within stories helped ground their sense of identification, as moral awareness often arose from observing cause and effect embodied in a narrative. Seeing how actions led to outcomes gave emotional weight to the story, allowing adolescents to not only imagine moral growth but also to develop a more nuanced understanding of right and wrong. Nevertheless, even as they became more aware of consequence and responsibility, many remained ambivalent—simultaneously drawn to and critical of the characters they admired.

---

*"The heroine is really unapologetic and has her convictions and sticks to them, but she's also a morally flawed character, which kind of creates this gray area around her. That's what*

*makes her so compelling and interesting, because she's not a perfect person—it's more reflective of real life. Sometimes we can be morally flawed people in real life.” (Sofia)*

*“She went from someone who sticks to the rules a lot to someone who was willing to bend them if necessary or break them if necessary (Sofia)*

*“She hits a point where you're like, ‘I can't classify you as a good person anymore.’ ... but she still really cares.”(Madison)*

*“I wouldn't mind being controversial because the cause... would be much bigger than my lifespan.”(Nathan)*

---

Participants often engaged with morally complex figures as mirrors of their own contradictions. These encounters revealed the difficulty of accepting parts of themselves they found harder to acknowledge, producing a mix of fascination and discomfort. Overall, such narratives simulated moral decisions, offering a safe space to test feelings of consequence, guilt, and justification. Within this ethical sandbox, adolescents began to explore their search for authenticity—trying to understand what felt true to them and the kind of individuals they wished to become.

#### **GET 4 - Being Seen: Belonging, Recognition, and Representation**

---

Across a significant portion of participants, identification with fiction became a source of belonging, recognition, and representation. In some instances, identification expressed the need to be seen.

---

*“We all want to see ourselves on the big screen.” (Madison)*

*“I would try to put myself out there as much as I could so people could see me... that's the same as her.” (Ana)*

*“I was trying to get what I never got years before... I kind of wanted that attention as much as I could.” (Ana)*

---

For many participants, identification functioned as a way of being seen—offering recognition where everyday life often withheld it. Fiction not only made adolescents feel visible but also prompted reflection on the challenges of cultural hybridity, particularly for those navigating multiple cultural worlds.

---

*“She questioned whether she was too American... which I really related to.” (Sofia)*

*“Sometimes it can be difficult to identify myself with that culture... seeing that reflected in a character is helpful.” (Sofia)*

*“Turning Red... the main protagonist is an Asian girl, and I can really relate to how she feels in her family.” (Xiaohua)*

---

Participants described how fiction helped them reconcile and connect different aspects of their cultural identity, bridging the gap between heritage and self-definition. Alongside this process, fiction also exposed them to cultural stereotypes, prompting reflection on how such representations shaped their own sense of belonging.

---

*“So a lot of fiction and movies are geared towards men... I don’t think I’m being represented.” (Madison)*

*“On Disney Channel... the sassy black friend... the trope should not designate how you write a character.” (Madison)*

---

Participants described how being faced with stereotypical representations gave them opportunities to assert agency and self-affirmation by rejecting reductive portrayals and seeking more authentic ones. In addition, fiction also reflected the stabilizing role of peers.

---

*“She accidentally found that when her friends came to her and stayed with her, she could control whether to become a red panda or not... The company of friends for me is exactly the same.” (Xiaohua)*

*“They prevent you from turning red? — To some extent, yes.” (Xiaohua)*

---

Fiction served as a space for recognition and self-definition. Through identifying with characters, adolescents felt seen, negotiated cultural belonging, and resisted stereotypes. These moments of representation fostered agency and affirmed their evolving sense of identity.

---

Collectively, these themes reveal fiction as a developmental space where imagination, emotion, and morality intersect. Through fictional worlds, adolescents explored who they are, who they might become, and how they wish to express themselves in the real world—highlighting the role of narrative imagination in shaping the self and its values.

## CHAPTER VI: DISCUSSION

The initial intention of this investigation was to explore how the relationship between adolescents and fiction unfolds through an existential lens. Throughout this paper, several theoretical and empirical steps were taken to arrive at this point—where the goal is to synthesize the various interpretations into a coherent sum.

Before proceeding, it is worth reminding the reader of the conceptual foundations guiding our interpretation. First, adolescence is viewed as a liminal and transformative phase, charged with developmental and existential tension. Second, human beings are conceived as storied selves, shaping experience through narrative. Third, experience is interpretative in nature. And fourth, fiction is conceptualized as an experimental space where these processes unfold symbolically and subjectively.

These findings invite us on a journey to reflect on adolescent subjectivity and how it instrumentalizes fiction as a symbolic arena. This, in turn, raises a central phenomenological question: how do we judge what is real in fiction? Participants' accounts blur the line between the imagined and the real. For them, fiction felt authentic not because it was factual, but because it resonated with their sense of self. Fiction, therefore, may be understood not as an alternate reality, but as an extension of lived reality itself—a phenomenological continuation of it.

The question of “truth in fiction” leads to our first major thread: fiction as a mirror of becoming. Essentially, fiction operates as a mirror—a reflective surface through which adolescents see themselves, their past selves, and their potential futures. At a time where adolescents feel unsure about affirming themselves beyond, fiction appeases adolescent uncertainty by presenting opportunities for projection onto characters that accompany evolving identity (Erikson, 1968; Marcia, 1966). For many participants, their past was riddled with struggles that were difficult to disentangle, that caused anger and frustration at a particular point in their lives. As a way of handling this distress, adolescents utilized fiction as a meaningful translator for making sense of their past suffering (Ricoeur, 1984). By seeing the patterns of their development represented in these stories, they better understood their reflective positioning towards them, gaining gradual awareness of the independent experiences that influence their current conception of self (McAdams, 1993; McLean & Pratt, 2006). For some participants, even the confusion of their past emotional states was

comprehended through fiction's symbolic language. Through the use of metaphor, fiction turned their inner conflict into visual imagery of color, creature, or light—making their past inner states feel less abstract and complex, and more contextual and concrete (Jung, 1959/1991). In the relationships with fictional characters, participants were able to reencounter versions of their past selves that they consider to have held different notions, beliefs, and behaviors. Seeing themselves through a distant narrative allowed them to reflect (White & Epston, 1990).

Not every subjects' identification with a fictional character was equally as strong: some reported distant influence from specific characters, others described pronounced blurred differentiation between character and self. The participants that described strong fictional identification with a specific character/characters—did so in the past. We question then, if the power of fictional identification is dependent on age. In early adolescence, roughly between the ages of 11 and 15, the self is still fluid and externally referenced. Because the sense of self is still emerging, exploration often takes the form of trying on different identities (Erikson, 1968; Marcia, 1966). The commitment to such identities is fragile because the mechanisms of exploration and commitment are still externally regulated during this stage of development. Which means that abandoning these commitments is not a regressive act; it is a differentiation one (Bowen, 1978). We highlight this developmental process to explain why some adolescents described their past identification with fictional characters as strongest (Kroger, 2007; Meeus et al., 1999). This means that the lines between character and self were more susceptible to influence given the age at which identification happened. For further investigation, we propose the study of successful differentiation processes, of individuals that experienced strong fictional identification in early adolescence.

Currently, some participants tacitly describe the past influence of fiction as somewhat distant; others consciously integrate the influence of their past identification into their current conception of self. Nonetheless, fiction was still a present way for adolescents to symbolically explore their transformation from youth onto adulthood. For participants, fiction served the purpose of a symbolic moratorium—a safe space where they could flirt or simulate with the idea of commitment through the character (Marcia, 1966). In some cases, through comparing themselves to the characters' story arcs, adolescents witnessed the possible consequences of commitment to “wrong” paths of becoming, and chose to not do the same. In other cases,

participants forgave their own past by seeing the character move on from theirs, and by taking bigger steps towards commitment. From a phenomenological perspective, these adolescents are not being inauthentic—they are precipitating on the edge of becoming by symbolically exploring different versions of the self (Kierkegaard, 1849/1983; Yalom, 1980).

Bridging the gap between past, present, and future was narrative. In this sense, narrative functioned as a stabilizing agent which legitimized the changes in the adolescent's development and provided them with the necessary continuity to keep identity coherent (Ricoeur, 1984; McAdams, 1993). Symbolically witnessing their life's stories in a fictional medium meant that instead of having the facts of existence scattered across time, adolescents forged identity on a subset of stories weaved by a structural narrative (Bruner, 1990; Habermas & Bluck, 2000).

It is important to add that the experiential tone of this theme was grounded, biographical, and often realist. This shows that participants—through reflective, autobiographical, and cognitive-emotional integration—actively interpreted their lives through fiction (McAdams, 1993; McLean & Pratt, 2006).

If fiction possesses the ability to mirror, it also possesses the ability to envelop—leading to lived presence within fictional reality. What was observed is that some participants do not just think about fiction, they inhabit it through sensorial, emotional, and affective absorption, creating a space where imagination and perception converge (Green & Brock, 2000; Ryan, 2001). This idea follows the conception that adolescents can feel fiction as a lived event, affirming experience as interpretative and symbolic. In phenomenological terms, perception entails meaning; in fictional reality meaning is modified to embodiment, transforming the passive spectator into lived participant (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2012). By mediation of music, aesthetic, costumes, and sensory detail (descriptive language that appeals to the five senses: sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch), fiction acts upon adolescents as they act upon it, producing an embodied relation with fictional content (Calleja, 2011; Lombard & Ditton, 1997). This potentially explains why one particular participant felt the desire to go beyond mere identification and into embodied identification, transcending spectatorship, and actually wanting to become more like the character through costume play.

Some participants felt sensory immersion as lived presence, meaning they experienced fiction phenomenologically as an “as-if” reality inhabited through perception and

emotion (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2012). Essentially, they felt transported through cognitive and emotional absorption—generating the feeling of “being there” (Green & Brock, 2000). Many of these experiences involved continuity and attachment across fictional time, where adolescents repeatedly sought to re-immense themselves in the fictional world—to return to the self they once inhabited within it (Ryan, 2001). This bond sees fiction as a relational presence that persists beyond its ending.

The concepts of transportation, immersion, and presence that the participants share explain why they understand the relationship with fiction as phenomenologically real; although, this is not sufficiently accurate when describing adolescents’ relationship with fiction. Simply being “drawn into” the fictional world does not quite capture what participants were doing. Sensory immersion, specifically, did act as a point of entry which anchored participants with immediate effect in the fictional world; although, a more accurate representation of what sustained them was an active process, not merely a receptive one (Calleja, 2011; Lombard & Ditton, 1997). Effectively explaining that adolescents do not merely lose themselves in their interaction with fiction—they are active participants that seek to experiment with it. Going beyond passive participation introduces the ethical dimension of engagement explored in the following section.

Participants described a process of evaluating decisions, values, and consequences through fictional characters and situations. Within this theme we observed a more agency-driven relationship with fiction, in the sense that participants utilized it for the purposes of hypothesizing and experimenting with ethical becoming (Yalom, 1980; Kierkegaard, 1849/1983). Participants found themselves safeguarded by the realistic threshold of fiction being distant, which in turn, enabled them to experiment without personal consequence (Bandura, 1986).

Most adolescents negotiated morality with fiction by striking a balance between conventional and postconventional beliefs, and their own constructivist attitude towards moral development (Kohlberg, 1984; Piaget, 1932). An observed pattern throughout most cases was that of a certain tension between expressing socially acceptable and universal moral beliefs, with the adolescents’ own “irrational” judgments. This explains why some participants felt compelled to express socially acceptable views on immoral characters, while at the same time, judging those same characters through subjective and constructed principles of morality.

Essentially meaning that the character is judged as objectively bad, but that there is still an understanding—even compassion—towards their motives. The drive behind this compassionate judgment supports Haidt's (2001) claim that moral judgement is not only rational but also emotionally primed. The adolescents' intuitive moral reactions were driven by the empathy they felt towards the fictional narrative and the character within it (Gilligan, 1982; Oatley, 1999).

The tension between rational and moral development was most vivid when identifying with representative characters of the shadow archetype (Jung, 1959/1991). More often than not, adolescents experienced identification with morally complex figures, many of which reflected shadow facades of the participants' character. In particular, moral complexity seemed to be an attractive characteristic for adolescents: they found these characters to be the most compelling, the most authentic characters (Haidt, 2001). Even despite their perceived immorality, adolescents found meaningful identification in their ambiguity.

What actually raised the adolescents' moral awareness was the visual and literal embodiment of cause and effect in the narrative world (Bandura, 1986). Adolescents saw the extended weight of consequence and responsibility of the characters' moral choices. In the case of one participant, some of the characters' choices and consequences went so far as to become actual warnings of her own process of becoming.

Despite identifying with morally complex figures, most participants were instead identifying with the perceived authenticity that these shadow characters portray. Part of the enticement of a villain is that they are being authentic to their truest selves, mirroring the adolescents' own desire to become an authentic being (Nietzsche, 1886/1992; Kierkegaard, 1849/1983). Fiction as an ethical sandbox essentially means that the emotional weight of fictional choice reflects existential responsibility by testing the participants' authenticity through imagined consequence (Yalom, 1980).

Moving on from internal judgment to external validation means addressing fiction's role in the adolescents' desire to be seen. As a developmental fact, adolescents long to feel mirrored and acknowledged by peers, culture, and family (Erikson, 1968). Being recognized in these mediums offers emotional legitimacy and social belonging—so is the case with fictional characters, since they also provide symbolic opportunities for recognition (Honneth, 1995).

Identification as a standalone concept, without its fictional tilt, satisfies both psychological belonging and sociocultural representation (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). When real contexts deny these primal desires, fiction compensates social invisibility by making participants feel visible and represented in stories (Hall, 1997; hooks, 1992). In this example, fiction helps to legitimize the version of self the adolescent wishes to embody. This was particularly true for bicultural participants that felt that their cultural identity was not properly integrated due to feeling ambivalent and unsure about which culture to identify with (Phinney, 1990). Fiction helped to reconcile the gap between cultural heritage and self-definition by representing characters who were themselves working through this identity struggle. The recognition that participants received does not only come from social validation, but instead from feeling confirmation of existence through fiction's gaze.

In the case of inaccurate representations, such as stereotypes or lack of representation, one participant utilized this opportunity for differentiation—to assert themselves in opposition to the mischaracterized character, thus defining the self through a more selective and critical attitude (Hall, 1997; Honneth, 1995).

Feeling recognized and belonging in a fictional medium revealed a specific pattern in fictional identification: the interplay between authenticity and recognition. This dynamic is central as it raises a phenomenological question: do we identify with fiction or does fiction identify with us? To better understand this dilemma, we first need to recognize that the relationship between authenticity and recognition is twofold: meaning that the character validates something in the adolescent—something authentic—which simultaneously sustains their need for recognition, because the adolescent is seeing that authentic part of themselves represented in fiction (Honneth, 1995; Rogers, 1951). Essentially, adolescents do not just see themselves in fiction but feel seen by it (Sartre, 1943/1992; Kierkegaard, 1849/1983). While this does not fully resolve the question, it suggests that the relationship with fiction is fundamentally reciprocal—an encounter of mutual recognition.

As we begin to expand on the themes surrounding social environments, family begins to enter the picture as an object of reflection in fiction (See Annex for further information). Even if this particular theme was not recurrently echoed in most participants' experience, some adolescents still found fiction as a safe zone to externalize conflict, test autonomy, and imagine reconciliation (Bowen, 1978; Chodorow, 1978).

The transitional space of adolescence includes a renegotiation of autonomy where the adolescent seeks differentiation from the familial self (Bowen, 1978; Steinberg, 2014). For some participants, fiction symbolized a space where they could safely negotiate the dynamic of attachment and independence with the family (Chodorow, 1978). Again, the bicultural aspect of some participants, now represented within the family, enabled them to reflect on cultural expectations with which they struggled in the past (Phinney, 1990). For one participant in specific, originating from an Asian background, the exertion of parental control throughout puberty was disproportionate and experienced as frustrating. The pressure to be perfect and the lack of emotional support made this participant feel inauthentic by forcing her to hide her perceived imperfection. Seeing a fictional character going through the exact same struggle allowed this adolescent to reevaluate their interpretation of the past by understanding that parents were also bound to their own experiences and cultural upbringing (Jung, 1959/1991). The participants that experienced fictional identification in the familial context mentioned that through the fictional depictions of family dynamics, they were able to re-humanize their parents by empathically understanding that they too were sometimes uncertain about their role (White & Epston, 1990).

Across the explored themes, we observed that adolescence is a phase of symbolic experimentation (Erikson, 1968; Marcia, 1966). Fictional identification unfolds not as an act of imitation or inauthenticity, but as a dynamic movement between reflection, immersion, ethical trial, recognition, and relational reconciliation. All of these movements, within the confines of fiction, either happen under a mix of symbolic mediation or under agency-driven reflection (Oatley, 1999; Green & Brock, 2000). Which re-emphasizes a previous question: Do we identify with fiction or does fiction identify with us? This question seeks to understand why humans are attracted to certain types of fiction (Cohen, 2001). Are participants consciously aware of fictional identification, or is it that fiction symbolically brought forth something within them?

Through our participants' experiences we observed that identification with fiction was mostly a reflective process, demonstrating explicit and active participation in symbolic meaning-making (Bruner, 1990). Apart from being a reflective act, fictional identification revealed something in the participants that was not directly addressed but still tacitly acknowledged—the search for authenticity (Yalom, 1980). Underlying the connection

between inner experience and symbolic expression was the coherence of authentic being (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2012). Each GET was a mode or a dimension of working towards authenticity. Together, these modes do not progress linearly; they form a cyclical process—an existential rehearsal of selfhood where adolescents start to become (Sartre, 1943/2003). In observing this connecting theme, it became understood that the adolescents’ desire for authenticity in fiction reflects Yalom’s idea of “becoming who one already is” (Yalom, 1980). The idea suggests that identification with fictional characters is not about becoming someone entirely new, but rather about revealing aspects that were latent and unacknowledged (Jung, 1959). Fiction then offers an impactful way of rehearsing the act of becoming by mirroring the adolescent’s authentic desires (Erikson, 1968). These findings confirm identity-development theories on fluidity and continuity (Kroger, 2007), but add phenomenological nuance, implying that the mirror fiction provides during development is not static; it is experienced (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

The following dissertation has been submitted for peer review analysis in the scholarly journal: *Psychology of Popular Media*. They are dedicated to publishing empirical research concerning the psychological experience and effects of human interaction with popular media in all of its forms including social media, games, apps, and fictional narratives (e.g., film, television, books).

## CHAPTER VII: CONCLUSION

This investigation began with a single and poignant objective: to explore the way in which adolescents engage with fictional identification. It extended to exploring how they phenomenologically express this relationship, and then to how they utilize this engagement to make sense of their own experiences. Nevertheless, the most honest way of conveying this investigation's ethos is through Albert Camus' quote: "fiction is the lie through which we tell the truth"—which is, essentially, what we are exploring. What has unfolded is a phenomenological account of how adolescents utilize fiction to expand their vision of becoming.

The interpretative path of this analysis followed a gradual trajectory toward the overarching understanding at which we have arrived. At the first level, we set the foundation of the analysis in the participants' voices—in what they said, what they meant, and their subtle contextual cues. From there, the participants' voices expended into phenomenological territory, seeking to understand what each adolescents' account revealed about their mode of being. At the final level, we broadened the scope of analysis to integrate existential thought, which revealed within the adolescents' mode of being an intrinsic desire for authenticity and becoming. The gradual progression of analysis allowed meaning to be constructed with the participants, not over them.

As a researcher, I remained constantly aware that interpretation is never neutral, but rather a dialogue between visions—mine and that of the participants. Throughout the analytic process, I sought to balance proximity and distance, allowing their lived language to lead before my own concepts intervened. Meaning emerged not as something extracted, but as something co-constructed in the reflective space between voices. As I made sense of the adolescents' accounts, their words simultaneously re-shaped my own interpretative lens.

Rather than summarizing each Group Experiential Theme, we articulate the thread that connects them, in a movement that is more interactive than linear. Articulating this process highlights a cycle of self-encounter, where fiction begins by inviting a reflection of the self. In this reflection, the adolescents reflect on the continuity of their identity through fiction's capability to mirror their transitions, which deepens through immersion and into embodiment—feeling fiction as a phenomenological lived presence. This expands into symbolic moral testing. In this case, fiction is the exploratory ground for adolescents to reflect

on their sense of authenticity and responsibility. The process then opens toward recognition, making the engagement with fiction a felt encounter where the adolescents feel seen and validated by their favorite stories. Subsequently, fiction invites a relational understanding of the family—through mirroring pubescent tensions of the past—and mending these wounds with reconciliation and empathy in the present.

Note that this pattern is not sequential, nor does it represent linear stages of development; instead, GETs are cyclical and interdependent, with each dimension expressing a way for adolescents to rehearse being.

Moving beyond thematic description, we reflect on the phenomenological idea that fiction feels “real” because it discloses meaning. In essence, fiction is a symbolic arena of becoming, where adolescents can safely experiment and rehearse who they already are. Through fiction’s gaze, they enact and reflect on the authenticity that is found within. This suggests that interest toward fiction is not externally guided, but instead driven by a strong need to make sense out of existence. Through the participants’ voices, we then find a possible answer to the question—do we identify with fiction, or does fiction identify with us? We propose that the truth in fiction is, essentially, the reflection of the truth in ourselves.

If fiction is indeed the lie through which we tell the truth, then these adolescents have shown that fiction is not inherently inauthentic but rather a revelation of their inner being. Within stories, they learned to see, feel, and eventually become. They will continue to do so through the incessant need to rewrite their own truth in the act of living.

## CHAPTER VIII: LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Being a typical idiographic sample of an IPA study, the immediate constraint we face is the small number of participants. This limits our ability to generalize any findings, directing the focus instead toward the depth of the participants' accounts. Typically, because of this idiographic constraint, participants would be recruited from a limited demographic; however, the inclusion of students from an international school allowed us to partially circumvent this limitation. Nonetheless, we were still constrained by institutional restrictions that only permitted access to a specific academic year.

Selecting participants who already felt a bond with fiction was itself a necessary but unavoidable bias. Another potential bias may relate to individuals who are naturally and temperamentally more receptive to fictional influence—the experience might not apply to those lower in trait openness.

If not for time constraints, a more accurate picture of fictional identification in adolescence could have been captured through a longitudinal study rather than a cross-sectional one. This limitation meant that we analyzed participants' experiences only in the present, thereby constraining our analytical lens on the phenomenon in terms of its developmental progression.

As discussed in Chapter VI, we recommend that future research examine the experience of strong identification and its influence on the differentiation process in early adolescence. The theoretical basis of this proposed investigation rests on the strength of fictional influence during a stage when identity is even more fluid and susceptible to identification—it would be valuable to explore its possible longitudinal effects on differentiation and identity. Furthermore, we recommend investigating approaches that integrate existential-phenomenological and narrative-identity perspectives, as well as further exploring the link between fiction and adolescent authenticity.

## CHAPTER X: BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Adler, J. M., Kissel, E. C., & McAdams, D. P. (2006). Emerging from the CAVE: Attributional style and the narrative study of identity in midlife adults. *Cognitive Therapy and Research*, 30(1), 39–51. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10608-006-9016-1>
- Adler, J. M., Skalina, L. M., & McAdams, D. P. (2006). The narrative reconstruction of psychotherapy and psychological health. *Psychotherapy Research*, 16(3), 367–382. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10503300600608355>
- Allen, K.-A., & Kern, M. L. (2017). School belonging in adolescents: Theory, research and practice. Springer. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-5996-4>
- Allen, K.-A., & Kern, M. L. (2017). The psychology of belonging. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315165678>
- Arnett, J. J. (1999). Adolescent storm and stress, reconsidered. *American Psychologist*, 54(5), 317–326. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.54.5.317>
- Arnett, J. J. (2000). Emerging adulthood: A theory of development from the late teens through the twenties. *American Psychologist*, 55(5), 469–480. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.55.5.469>
- Arnett, J. J. (2004). *Emerging adulthood: The winding road from the late teens through the twenties*. Oxford University Press.
- Bailenson, J. N., & Blascovich, J. (2004). Avatars. In W. S. Bainbridge (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of human-computer interaction* (pp. 64–68). Berkshire.
- Bandura, A. (1986). *Social foundations of thought and action: A social cognitive theory*. Prentice Hall.
- Bandura, A. (1999). Moral disengagement in the perpetration of inhumanities. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 3(3), 193–209. [https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327957PSPR0303\\_3](https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327957PSPR0303_3)
- Bandura, A. (2001). Social cognitive theory of mass communication. *Media Psychology*, 3(3), 265–299. [https://doi.org/10.1207/S1532785XMEP0303\\_03](https://doi.org/10.1207/S1532785XMEP0303_03)
- Barber, B. K. (1996). Parental psychological control: Revisiting a neglected construct. *Child Development*, 67(6), 3296–3319. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1131780>
- Barthes, R. (1993). *Mythologies* (A. Lavers, Trans.). Vintage. (Original work published 1957)

- Baumeister, R. F., & Leary, M. R. (1995). The need to belong: Desire for interpersonal attachments as a fundamental human motivation. *Psychological Bulletin*, 117(3), 497–529. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.117.3.497>
- Baumrind, D. (1991). The influence of parenting style on adolescent competence and substance use. *Journal of Early Adolescence*, 11(1), 56–95. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0272431691111004>
- Berry, J. W. (1997). Immigration, acculturation, and adaptation. *Applied Psychology: An International Review*, 46(1), 5–34. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1464-0597.1997.tb01087.x>
- Bhaskar, R. (2008). *A realist theory of science* (2nd ed.). Routledge. (Original work published 1975)
- Bhabha, H. K. (1994). *The location of culture*. Routledge.
- Biocca, F. (1997). The cyborg's dilemma: Progressive embodiment in virtual environments. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 3(2). <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1083-6101.1997.tb00070.x>
- Biocca, F., Harms, C., & Burgoon, J. K. (2003). Toward a more robust theory and measure of social presence: Review and suggested criteria. *Presence: Teleoperators and Virtual Environments*, 12(5), 456–480. <https://doi.org/10.1162/10547460322761270>
- Blackburn, J. (2018). *The Hunger Games and philosophy: A critique of pure treason*. Open Court.
- Bowen, M. (1978). *Family therapy in clinical practice*. Jason Aronson.
- Boyd, B. (2009). *On the origin of stories: Evolution, cognition, and fiction*. Harvard University Press.
- Bruner, J. (1990). *Acts of meaning*. Harvard University Press.
- Calleja, G. (2011). *In-game: From immersion to incorporation*. MIT Press. <https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/9780262014873.001.0001>
- Campbell, J. (2004). *The hero with a thousand faces* (Commemorative ed.). Princeton University Press. (Original work published 1949)
- Cassirer, E. (1944). *An essay on man: An introduction to a philosophy of human culture*. Yale University Press.
- Casey, B. J., Jones, R. M., & Hare, T. A. (2008). The adolescent brain. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 1124(1), 111–126. <https://doi.org/10.1196/annals.1440.010>

- Chang, E. C. (1998). Cultural differences in perfectionism: Implications for depression and self-concept. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 45(3), 304–312. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0167.45.3.304>
- Chodorow, N. (1978). *The reproduction of mothering*. University of California Press.
- Cohen, J. (2001). Defining identification: A theoretical look at the identification of audiences with media characters. *Mass Communication & Society*, 4(3), 245–264. [https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327825MCS0403\\_01](https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327825MCS0403_01)
- Coplan, A. (2006). Catching characters' emotions: Emotional contagion and empathy. *Film Studies*, 8(1), 26–38. <https://doi.org/10.7227/FS.8.4>
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2014). *Flow and the foundations of positive psychology: The collected works of Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi*. Springer. (Original work published 1997) <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-017-9088-8>
- Dalley, S. (1998). *The epic of Gilgamesh*. Oxford University Press.
- Decety, J., & Jackson, P. L. (2004). The functional architecture of human empathy. *Behavioral and Cognitive Neuroscience Reviews*, 3(2), 71–100. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1534582304267187>
- Donald, M. (1991). *Origins of the modern mind: Three stages in the evolution of culture and cognition*. Harvard University Press.
- Eatough, V., & Smith, J. A. (2017). Interpretative phenomenological analysis. In C. Willig & W. Stainton-Rogers (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research in psychology* (2nd ed., pp. 193–209). SAGE.
- Eco, U. (1986). *Travels in hyperreality*. Harcourt.
- Elkind, D. (1967). Egocentrism in adolescence. *Child Development*, 38(4), 1025–1034. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1127100>
- Erikson, E. H. (1968). *Identity: Youth and crisis*. W. W. Norton.
- Flett, G. L., & Hewitt, P. L. (2002). *Perfectionism: Theory, research, and treatment*. American Psychological Association. <https://doi.org/10.1037/10458-000>
- Frankl, V. E. (2006). *Man's search for meaning*. Beacon Press. (Original work published 1946)
- Freud, A. (2018). *The ego and the mechanisms of defence* (Rev. ed.). Routledge. (Original work published 1936). <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429481550>

- Freud, S. (1923). *The ego and the id* (J. Riviere, Trans.). Hogarth Press.
- Freud, S. (1953). *The interpretation of dreams* (J. Strachey, Trans.). In J. Strachey (Ed. & Trans.), *The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud* (Vols. 4–5, pp. 1–630). Hogarth Press. (Original work published 1900)
- Gallese, V. (2007). Before and below “theory of mind”: Embodied simulation and the neural correlates of social cognition. *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences*, 362(1480), 659–669. <https://doi.org/10.1098/rstb.2006.2002>
- Gergen, K. J. (1991). *The saturated self: Dilemmas of identity in contemporary life*. Basic Books.
- Gilligan, C. (1982). *In a different voice: Psychological theory and women’s development*. Harvard University Press.
- Gottschall, J. (2012). *The storytelling animal: How stories make us human*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.
- Green, M. C. (2005). Transportation into narrative worlds: The role of prior knowledge and perceived realism. *Discourse Processes*, 38(2), 247–266. [https://doi.org/10.1207/s15326950dp3802\\_5](https://doi.org/10.1207/s15326950dp3802_5)
- Green, M. C., & Brock, T. C. (2000). The role of transportation in the persuasiveness of public narratives. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 79(5), 701–721. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.79.5.701>
- Green, M. C., & Brock, T. C. (2004). In the mind’s eye: Transportation–imagery model of narrative persuasion. In M. C. Green, J. J. Strange, & T. C. Brock (Eds.), *Narrative impact: Social and cognitive foundations* (pp. 315–341). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Habermas, T., & Bluck, S. (2000). Getting a life: The emergence of the life story in adolescence. *Psychological Bulletin*, 126(5), 748–769. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.126.5.748>
- Haidt, J. (2001). The emotional dog and its rational tail: A social intuitionist approach to moral judgment. *Psychological Review*, 108(4), 814–834. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.108.4.814>
- Haidt, J., & Joseph, C. (2004). Intuitive ethics: How innately prepared intuitions generate culturally variable virtues. *Daedalus*, 133(4), 55–66. <https://doi.org/10.1162/0011526042365555>
- Hall, S. (1997). *Representation: Cultural representations and signifying practices*. Sage.

- Heidegger, M. (1962). *Being and time* (J. Macquarrie & E. Robinson, Trans.). Harper & Row. (Original work published 1927)
- Hermans, H. J. M. (2001). The dialogical self: Toward a theory of personal and cultural positioning. *Culture & Psychology*, 7(3), 243–281. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354067X0173001>
- Hinyard, L. J., & Kreuter, M. W. (2007). Using narrative communication as a tool for health behavior change: A conceptual, theoretical, and empirical overview. *Health Education & Behavior*, 34(5), 777–792. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1090198106291963>
- Hoffman, M. L. (2000). *Empathy and moral development: Implications for caring and justice*. Cambridge University Press.
- hooks, b. (1992). *Black looks: Race and representation*. South End Press.
- Honneth, A. (1995). *The struggle for recognition: The moral grammar of social conflicts*. Polity Press.
- Horton, D., & Wohl, R. R. (1956). Mass communication and parasocial interaction: Observations on intimacy at a distance. *Psychiatry*, 19(3), 215–229. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00332747.1956.11023049>
- Hublin, J.-J., Ben-Ncer, A., Bailey, S. E., Freidline, S. E., Neubauer, S., Skinner, M. M., Bergmann, I., Le Cabec, A., Benazzi, S., Harvati, K., & Gunz, P. (2017). New fossils from Jebel Irhoud, Morocco and the pan-African origin of *Homo sapiens*. *Nature*, 546(7657), 289–292. <https://doi.org/10.1038/nature22336>
- Igartua, J. J. (2010). Identification with characters and narrative persuasion through fictional feature films. *Communications*, 35(4), 347–373. <https://doi.org/10.1515/comm.2010.019>
- Jung, C. G. (1969). *The archetypes and the collective unconscious* (R. F. C. Hull, Trans., 2nd ed., Vol. 9, Part 1). Princeton University Press. (Original work published 1934–1954)
- Kierkegaard, S. (1983). *The sickness unto death* (H. V. Hong & E. H. Hong, Trans.). Princeton University Press.
- Kierkegaard, S. (1983). *Fear and trembling* (H. V. Hong & E. H. Hong, Trans.). Princeton University Press. (Original work published 1843)
- Kleinman, A. (1988). *The illness narratives: Suffering, healing, and the human condition*. Basic Books.

- Klimmt, C., Hefner, D., & Vorderer, P. (2009). The video game experience as “true” identification: A theory of enjoyable alterations of players’ self-perception. *Communication Theory*, 19(4), 351–373. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2885.2009.01347.x>
- Klimmt, C., Hefner, D., Vorderer, P., Roth, C., & Blake, C. (2010). Identification with video game characters as automatic shift of self-perceptions. *Media Psychology*, 13(4), 323–338. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15213269.2010.524911>
- Kroger, J. (2007). *Identity development: Adolescence through adulthood* (2nd ed.). Sage.
- Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (1980). *Metaphors we live by*. University of Chicago Press.
- Lamerichs, N. (2011). Stranger than fiction: Fan identity in cosplay. *Transformative Works and Cultures*, 7. <https://doi.org/10.3983/twc.2011.0246>
- Laplanche, J., & Pontalis, J.-B. (2019). *The language of psycho-analysis* (D. Nicholson-Smith, Trans.). Routledge. (Original work published 1973)
- Lee, K. M. (2004). Presence, explicated. *Communication Theory*, 14(1), 27–50. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2885.2004.tb00302.x>
- Lombard, M., & Ditton, T. (1997). At the heart of it all: The concept of presence. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 3(2). <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1083-6101.1997.tb00072.x>
- Mar, R. A., & Oatley, K. (2008). The function of fiction is the abstraction and simulation of social experience. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 3(3), 173–192. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1745-6924.2008.00073.x>
- Marcia, J. E. (1966). Development and validation of ego-identity status. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 3(5), 551–558. <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0023281>
- Marcia, J. E. (1980). Identity in adolescence. In J. Adelson (Ed.), *Handbook of adolescent psychology* (pp. 159–187). Wiley.
- McAdams, D. P. (1993). *The stories we live by: Personal myths and the making of the self*. Guilford Press.
- McAdams, D. P. (2001). The psychology of life stories. *Review of General Psychology*, 5(2), 100–122. <https://doi.org/10.1037/1089-2680.5.2.100>
- McDougall, I., Brown, F. H., & Fleagle, J. G. (2005). Stratigraphic placement and age of modern humans from Omo Kibish, Ethiopia. *Nature*, 433(7027), 733–736. <https://doi.org/10.1038/nature03258>

- Merriam-Webster. (n.d.-a). Identification. In Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary. Retrieved September 21, 2025, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/identification>
- Merriam-Webster. (n.d.-b). Identity. In Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary. Retrieved September 21, 2025, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/identity>
- Monahan, K. C., Steinberg, L., & Cauffman, E. (2009). Affiliation with antisocial peers, susceptibility to peer influence, and antisocial behavior during the transition to adulthood. *Developmental Psychology*, 45(6), 1520–1530. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0017417>
- Neimeyer, R. A. (2001). Meaning reconstruction and the experience of loss. American Psychological Association. <https://doi.org/10.1037/10397-000>
- Nietzsche, F. (1967). *On the genealogy of morals* (W. Kaufmann & R. J. Hollingdale, Trans.). Vintage. (Original work published 1887)
- Nietzsche, F. (2006). *Thus spoke Zarathustra* (A. del Caro, Trans.; R. Pippin, Ed.). Cambridge University Press.
- Oatley, K. (1999). Why fiction may be twice as true as fact: Fiction as cognitive and emotional simulation. *Review of General Psychology*, 3(2), 101–117. <https://doi.org/10.1037/1089-2680.3.2.101>
- Oatley, K. (2002). Emotions and the story worlds of fiction. In M. C. Green, J. J. Strange, & T. C. Brock (Eds.), *Narrative impact: Social and cognitive foundations* (pp. 39–69). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Oatley, K. (2011). *Such stuff as dreams: The psychology of fiction*. Wiley-Blackwell.
- Oxford Learner's Dictionaries. (n.d.). Identify. In Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary. Retrieved September 21, 2025, from <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/identify>
- Oxford Reference. (n.d.). Identity. In Oxford Reference. Retrieved September 21, 2025, from <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780192830982.001.0001/acref-9780192830982-e-7482>
- Phinney, J. S. (1990). Ethnic identity in adolescents and adults: Review of research. *Psychological Bulletin*, 108(3), 499–514. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.108.3.499>
- Piaget, J. (1972). *The psychology of the child*. Basic Books.
- Piaget, J. (1972). Intellectual evolution from adolescence to adulthood. *Human Development*, 15(1), 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1159/000271225>

- Ratan, R. A., Beyea, D., Li, B. J., & Graciano, L. (2020). Avatar characteristics induce users' behavioral conformity with small-to-medium effect sizes: A meta-analysis of the Proteus effect. *Media Psychology*, 23(5), 651–675. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15213269.2019.1623698>
- Ricoeur, P. (1984). *Time and narrative* (Vol. 1; K. McLaughlin & D. Pellauer, Trans.). University of Chicago Press.
- Ricoeur, P. (1992). *Oneself as another* (K. Blamey, Trans.). University of Chicago Press.
- Riva, G., Waterworth, J. A., Waterworth, E. L., & Mantovani, F. (2007). From intention to action: The role of presence. *New Ideas in Psychology*, 25(2), 97–105. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.newideapsych.2007.02.002>
- Ryan, M.-L. (2001). *Narrative as virtual reality: Immersion and interactivity in literature and electronic media*. Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *American Psychologist*, 55(1), 68–78. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.55.1.68>
- Sarbin, T. R. (Ed.). (1986). *Narrative psychology: The storied nature of human conduct*. Praeger.
- Sartre, J.-P. (1992). *Being and nothingness: A phenomenological essay on ontology* (H. E. Barnes, Trans.). Washington Square Press. (Original work published 1943)
- Shweder, R. A., Mahapatra, M., & Miller, J. G. (1987). Culture and moral development. In J. Kagan & S. Lamb (Eds.), *The emergence of morality in young children* (pp. 1–83). University of Chicago Press.
- Slater, M. (2003). A note on presence terminology. *Presence Connect*, 3(3). <http://presence.cs.ucl.ac.uk>
- Slater, M., & Wilbur, S. (1997). A framework for immersive virtual environments (FIVE): Speculations on the role of presence in virtual environments. *Presence: Teleoperators & Virtual Environments*, 6(6), 603–616. <https://doi.org/10.1162/pres.1997.6.6.603>
- Smith, J. A., Flowers, P., & Larkin, M. (2009). *Interpretative phenomenological analysis: Theory, method and research*. Sage.
- Steinberg, L. (2014). *Adolescence* (10th ed.). McGraw-Hill.
- Steinberg, L. (2014). *Age of opportunity: Lessons from the new science of adolescence*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

- Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1979). An integrative theory of intergroup conflict. In W. G. Austin & S. Worchel (Eds.), *The social psychology of intergroup relations* (pp. 33–47). Brooks/Cole.
- Tattersall, I. (2019). The minimal human: The emergence of *Homo sapiens* in the African Pleistocene. *Evolutionary Anthropology*, 28(1), 5–14. <https://doi.org/10.1002/evan.21749>
- Tigay, J. H. (1982). *The evolution of the Gilgamesh epic*. University of Pennsylvania Press.
- van Deurzen, E. (2012). *Existential counselling & psychotherapy in practice* (3rd ed.). Sage.
- Valkenburg, P. M., & Peter, J. (2013). The differential susceptibility to media effects model. *Journal of Communication*, 63(2), 221–243. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcom.12024>
- Vorderer, P., Klimmt, C., & Ritterfeld, U. (2004). Enjoyment: At the heart of media entertainment. *Communication Theory*, 14(4), 388–408. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2885.2004.tb00321.x>
- White, M., & Epston, D. (1990). *Narrative means to therapeutic ends*. Norton.
- Wiessner, P. (2014). Embers of society: Firelight talk among the Ju/'hoansi Bushmen. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 111(39), 14027–14035. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1404212111>
- Yalom, I. D. (1980). *Existential psychotherapy*. Basic Books.
- Yee, N., & Bailenson, J. (2007). The Proteus effect: The effect of transformed self-representation on behavior. *Human Communication Research*, 33(3), 271–290. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2958.2007.00299.x>

### **Web dictionaries & etymology**

- Harper, D. (n.d.-a). Identify. In *Online Etymology Dictionary*. Retrieved September 21, 2025, from <https://www.etymonline.com/word/identify>
- Harper, D. (n.d.-b). Identification. In *Online Etymology Dictionary*. Retrieved September 21, 2025, from <https://www.etymonline.com/word/identification>

## CHAPTER XI: ANEXES

### Annex A - Consent Forms

---

#### Parental Consent Form

**Study Title: The Experience of Fictional Identification in Adolescence**

**Researcher: João Maria Fino Neves André**

Institution: ISPA - Instituto Universitário de Ciências Psicológicas, Sociais e da Vida

Contact: [joaomariafino@gmail.com](mailto:joaomariafino@gmail.com) / +351 918 560 166

Supervisor: Vitor Amorim Rodrigues / [victor\\_rodrigues@ispa.pt](mailto:victor_rodrigues@ispa.pt)

Dear Parent/Guardian,

Your child is invited to participate in a research study exploring how adolescents experience identification with fictional characters. This study aims to understand how such experiences influence their sense of identity. The study involves an interview with your child, lasting approximately 1 hour, at his/hers educational facility.

Participation is entirely voluntary, and you or your child may withdraw at any point without consequences. The study is conducted in accordance with ethical guidelines, as well as it ensures total anonymity and confidentiality. The data will only be handled by the research team, which includes myself and the coordinator of the study.

**What participation involves:**

- A one-on-one interview with your child.
- Questions about their experiences with fictional characters and stories.
- All responses will be anonymous in the final report.

**Data Usage:**

- The interview will be audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis.
- Data will be securely stored and destroyed 2 years after the study.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions before deciding.

By signing below, you consent for your child to participate.

**Parent/Guardian Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Adolescent Participant Consent Form**

**Study Title: The Experience of Fictional Identification in Adolescence**

**Researcher: João Maria Fino Neves André**

Institution: ISPA - Instituto Universitário de Ciências Psicológicas, Sociais e da Vida

Contact: [joamariafino@gmail.com](mailto:joamariafino@gmail.com) / +351 918 560 166

Supervisor: Vitor Amorim Rodrigues / [victor\\_rodrigues@ispa.pt](mailto:victor_rodrigues@ispa.pt)

Dear Participant,

You are invited to take part in a research study about how teenagers connect with fictional characters and stories. I would like to interview you to learn more about your experiences with this concept.

**What participation involves:**

- A one-on-one interview lasting about 1 hour.
- Questions about your experiences with fictional characters.
- Your answers will not be shared with anyone except the research team.

**Your rights:**

- Participation is your choice. You can stop at any time without a reason.
- Your answers will be kept private, and your name will not be published in the study.

By signing below, you agree to participate in the study.

**Your Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

---



Mestrado Integrado em Psicologia Clínica

**Guião de Entrevista Semi - Estruturada**

**Orientador de Tese: Prof. Dr. Vítor Amorim Rodrigues**

Discentes

João Maria Fino Neves André - n°26618

Ano Letivo 2024/2025

Questions:

Can you tell me about the types of fictional entertainment (movies, series, games, books ...) that you enjoy the most?

Why do you think you prefer consuming (...) over the other types of fiction? What about them makes you engage with it more often?

Can you talk to me about the characteristics of the stories you are usually drawn to?

Can you tell me about some of your favorite characters?

What aspects of their character made you relate to them?

Has a character you identify with ever done things you wish you could do?

Do you think you have ever seen your own personal struggles represented in your favourite characters?

In what ways have your favorite characters made you reflect about your past or your future?

Have you ever felt that some of your choices were directly influenced by characters?

**Prompt:** How do you feel about that influence?

Do you think that in some ways you've incorporated characteristics of the characters you admire in your own personality?

---

## Annex C - GET 5: Families, Control, and Expectation

---

Participants often reflected on family as a space of love, control, and unspoken demand. Fiction provided a way to recognize how care can also confine, revealing the tension between protection and autonomy that shapes many adolescents' relationships with their parents.

---

*"There was a time that her parents discovered she turned into a red panda... and then they just took everything out of her bedroom and let her try to control the whole thing... That's similar to me."* (Xiaohua)

*"My dad forced me to stay in the living room to study so that he could check on me from time to time. And there was a security camera in the living room and he could just check on me whenever he wanted in his bedroom"*(Xiaohua)

*There's kind of a stigma that daughters in particular should stay at home, not go to college, make sure they're there to take care of their parents in their older age... While that can be fair in some instances, it can be limiting as well."* (Sofia)

---

Scenes of parental intrusion resonated with experiences of being managed or restricted. Through identification, participants could explore frustration toward control while acknowledging that it often came from care. Fiction created distance to see these dynamics from the outside, preparing the ground for reflection on the weight of expectation.

---

*"It feels like being perfect is kind of an ordinary thing. Like, if you try hard, you have to be perfect."* (Xiaohua)

*"Because of the high expectations, Meilin isn't showing the full of herself to her mom... For me, I think sometimes it is a problem of Asian parents."* (Xiaohua)

*"When Meilin cannot meet some expectations... she just hides the exam papers. I think that also causes the children to become avoidant."* (Xiaohua)

*Her sister was supposedly, like, the perfect daughter. Stayed at home, only went to community college, took care of her parents... But then they find out a lot more about her sister through secrets that were revealed."* (Sofia)

---

Perfection appeared as both duty and disguise. This participant recognized how love could feel conditional—something earned through success and maintained by hiding flaws. Fiction

made visible the emotional cost of living up to ideals and invited a more compassionate view of why such pressure exists.

---

*“I never really thought about how parents are also living their life for the first time... maybe my parents are also going through it.” (Ana)*

*For me, my family will always come first, and treating my parents right always comes first. And when you're a teenager... I'd see myself being rude to my parents... I think the biggest thing was when I could see how she was treating her parents and how that would affect her parents.” (Ana)*

*“I could see that a lot in the movie as well, how the parents didn't know how to deal with a kid like that... I think that was one of the things.”(Ana)*

---

As identification deepened, some adolescents began to see parents as imperfect and human. Fiction helped them reframe parental authority as a shared vulnerability. Across these reflections, fiction served as a symbolic arena for re-examining family ties—where love, control, and expectation coexist. Through identifying with characters, adolescents could challenge pressure, recognize care, and humanize those who shape their becoming.

## Annex D - Ana's Interview

Experiential Statements	Transcript	Exploratory Noting
<p>Fictional identification is strengthened when characters embody authenticity</p> <p>The movie <i>Thirteen</i> provided a symbolic narrative parallel to the participant's own turning point, reinforcing awareness of risk and identity boundaries.</p> <p>The protagonist offered an emotional mirror, allowing the participant to recognise her own adolescent struggles with impulsivity, susceptibility, and shaping by peers.</p>	<p>Yeah. I was always more drawn to them, mostly because they felt more authentic in how they were. Even if their actions were a bit more extreme at times, they were still a bit more authentic. Also, my culture played a role - there were a lot of people from Mozambique in those schools, so I naturally felt a connection to that. I think it was a turning point for my social life because I found myself exposed to things I probably shouldn't have been - not crime, but just kids doing "hood stuff" you could say. That kind of shaped my views on a lot of things in life and the movie shows a lot of that and that's why I really liked <i>Thirteen</i>. It captures how young kids - 12 or 13 years old, not just 16 or 17 - can be pulled into that lifestyle if they're not careful. The movie does a good job of showing that, which is why I liked the movie.</p> <p>Okay, so can you explain more about the connection between the movie and the whole "hood vs. posh" dynamic?</p> <p>Yeah. So the movie takes place in a poorer area of the U.S., and it follows a girl who starts high school and she sees how everyone else is separated into groups and she wants to be part of the cool kids - the group she admires - so she changes herself completely so she could fit that narrative. But as the movie goes on, she starts doing it too much. She starts doing heavy drugs at a really young age and she starts to be really mean to her parents. And then there's a breaking point where something bad happens, and she had to stop.</p> <p>What was the breaking point?</p> <p>Basically her mom finds out everything she's been doing, and her friend ratted on her. That's a turning point. That didn't happen to me, but when I was part of that group, I started seeing friends getting into serious trouble, and some even passing away because of crime and stuff. So for me, after that, I had to distance myself from it.</p> <p>Because it was too intense?</p> <p>Yeah, it was becoming too much. I started thinking, if I don't leave now, I fear that I'll be one of them, and even if I wouldn't actually do anything, I'm surrounded by them, and I see that as me being part of them and being almost as bad as them, cause if I'm making them my friends what does that make me? Makes me one of them, so I was like, I can't be that type of person anymore so I decided to leave. And I think that's why I really like the movie - it shows how, like a curve, a big event can really change the course of your life.</p> <p>I understand.. Just so you know, sometimes I might sound a bit repetitive and ask repetitive questions, but it's because I truly want to understand.</p> <p>Mhmm. No worries!</p> <p>I wanted to ask you - do you relate to her in more ways than just that? Do you feel connected to her personality wise? Or is it just her life experience?</p> <p>I think we had somewhat of the same personality because, especially girls at that age, they're kind of explosive and don't really know how to deal with their own emotions and she was a lot like that. She would lash out a lot and talk back a lot, and even if I wasn't as extreme as her, I could see a lot of my own emotions being portrayed in a character that I had never seen before. So I liked that a lot. And yeah, just the fact that she wasn't easily manipulated but was easily shaped into someone she shouldn't be - I think that resonated a lot with my personality. I think when I was younger, I was more easily susceptible to people - not necessarily being influenced, but being affected by the people around me more than I should have. So I saw that a lot in myself.</p>	<p>Strong value placed on authenticity;</p> <p>Identification tied to cultural belonging and shared background</p> <p>Sees the film as realistic and relevant to her own age context</p> <p>Parallels between personal lived experience and the film's narrative; fictional story mirrors life trajectory possibilities</p> <p>Internal moral conflict and identity struggle; fictional narrative validates real fears of being shaped by peers.</p> <p>Emotional resonance with character's personality and struggles</p> <p>Subtle distinction between manipulation and susceptibility to influence</p>

Experiential Statements	Transcript	Exploratory Noting
<p>Identification with <i>Thirteen</i> connects not only to social identity (authenticity vs. superficiality) but also to unmet needs for parental involvement, projected onto Tracy's story.</p> <p>Fictional characters provide adolescents with a mirror for both desired belonging and unfulfilled familial expectations.</p>	<p>Does this go back to what you were saying about the hood identity and things like that?</p> <p>Yeah. Like, you would never see me dressed up as them or anything, but I would want to be with them a lot. I wanted to be in their community because, even if the bad stuff was bad, there was also a lot of good. Like, the loyalty they had between them and just the experiences they had. Like, even if it was just a simple hangout at someone's house or the local grandma's house. We'd always go, and the music and the food would kind of push all the bad stuff into the corner and we could actually focus on the good moments.</p> <p>Yeah, because you were talking a little bit about the difference between them and the posh crowd, and at least the word that struck out to me was authenticity.</p> <p>Exactly. They're more superficial. Even in the school - or in other private schools - a lot of them try to put an image out that is not them, because they want to be superior or they want to be portrayed as this person that's way higher in life, that they're more put together and stuff, which we're not. We're still kids, we don't know anything. So I think that I didn't really like that type of people, that wanted to pretend they knew everything and that they were so high up in life, when we're all just kids in school.</p> <p>And is this movie in any way related to that topic specifically; to posh, to authenticity and things like that?</p> <p>It talks about authenticity for sure. But not really about the posh and the contrast between them. It focused more on the hood, on the more dangerous parts of town, rather than contrasting between the rich and poor. You could see it sometimes, but you wouldn't notice it very much because all the characters were in the poorer side in the movie.</p> <p>(The interview was interrupted during this moment, which led to a brief 2 min pause where we were quiet.)</p> <p>Mhmm. I wanted to ask you something - what was the name of the character? Tracy?</p> <p>Tracy, yeah.</p> <p>Okay. Do you think that Tracy did things you wish you could do?</p> <p>Not that she did, but she was kind of forced to stop at a younger age than I was, and I wish not that I had an intervention, because again I didn't really do much of anything, but I wish my parents had noticed a bit more - kind of like how Tracy's mom noticed what was happening to her. So maybe I wish my parents could've stepped up a bit more. But I guess they didn't really notice anything when it was happening, but I wish they were more involved in changing my life around rather than it being outside experiences that did it for me.</p> <p>So, Tracy's parents were a bit more aware of her situation?</p> <p>Yeah. Also because she was a bit more - how do I say it - more showy of it. She would act out and be more rebellious than I was. But yeah, I wish my parents could have been a bit more... like maybe they saw it but didn't really say anything. I wish they were a bit more open and that they could see it.</p>	<p>Attraction to belonging and authenticity in the "hood" identity</p> <p>ThirteenThe film validates and reflects her lived experience of authenticity tied to less privileged communities</p> <p>Identification with Tracy is not just social but family-related: longing for parental intervention</p>

Experiential Statements	Transcript	Exploratory Noting
<p>Identification with <i>Thirteen</i> allows the participant to confront fears of identity contamination, seeing herself reflected in peers' decline even if she wasn't directly engaging in the same behaviours.</p> <p>Cinematic imagery intensifies her perception of both others and herself</p>	<p>Do you think you were a bit more introspective or you kept more on low?</p> <p>Yeah. Also cause I have an older brother, and he's extremely loud as a person. So sometimes I'm the quieter one so sometimes I wouldn't really talk much. And it was COVID, so I had other stuff going on as well. So it wasn't anything really to worry about from my parents' view, so I didn't get much of an intervention - they just didn't really know about it.</p> <p>And do you think there were, in terms of personal struggles, things you have gone through in your life that made you relate to Tracy?</p> <p>Again, I don't think first person, but I could see a lot of my friends going through.. like, I would see them doing hard drugs right in front of me, and at 12 years old if you see another 12 year old doing that - for me it was kind of a shock, but the more I saw it, the more it became normal to me. And with her kind of the same thing - she wanted to be cooler, so she was doing it. And the people around her just became desensitised to it, cause they felt like: "oh it's just another thing she's doing". So I wasn't doing exactly what she was doing, but I was seeing everyone around me doing it and it kind of made me feel it too - but more like in a third person kind of way.</p> <p>Were you scared?</p> <p>Not at first. Also because my grandma is a drug therapist - she works with drug abuse cases. She would always teach me and explain to me how things are and how I couldn't really be scared, because they are not gonna do anything to me if they're my friends - that's what I would always think - cause they're doing it because of their own struggles, and I don't fully know what they were going through, so I couldn't really be scared because maybe they're just as scared as I am, of their own life. So I wasn't really scared. I was more concerned, because I knew how bad it can get, with drugs, especially at such a young age - like mentally. So I was a bit concerned but not really scared.</p> <p>Can you explain to me a little more about that concern?</p> <p>Yeah. Mostly, I started seeing them slip in school more. I started seeing kids who, at the start of the year, were quite bright and looked full of life - they started to almost look grey. And the movie also showed that - the way it started in colour, but with every passing minute, it became more and more black and white. So that also kind of showed in people's faces. I could see them diminishing as a person. And for me, seeing a 13 or 14 year old kid lose all the life sucked out of their eyes - to me it was concerning. But I wasn't scared. I don't know why. But I was mostly just concerned that I was maybe going to lose them. Or maybe I was seeing a version of me in them - like, even if I wasn't doing what they were doing, maybe, in a way, I was being sucked into that world too. Like, spiritually, I am becoming just as grey as them.</p> <p>Mhmm. Were you losing your colour?</p> <p>Yeah. And again, it was COVID, which was already a hard time for kids to go through. But with all of that combined - seeing everyone go in that direction - it almost felt like that was the only direction to go in. So for me, it was concerning to see them start to look that way, because you could see it in their faces. Those kinds of drugs - you can see it. They start to look really bad.</p>	<p>Repeated exposure leading to desensitisation; participant observes a social normalisation process.</p> <p>Uses filmic imagery as a concrete lens to describe peers' loss of vitality.</p> <p>Emotional stance is concern/anticipation rather than panic;</p> <p>Participant explicitly imagines identity overlap with peers and uses a colour metaphor to describe perceived loss of self.</p>

Experiential Statements	Transcript	Exploratory Noting
<p>Fictional identification here works as a developmental warning: rewatching across ages helped her project possible futures and catalysed a decision to avoid them.</p> <p>Identification is ambivalent — she both admires aspects of the character’s freedom and maturity, while also fearing the destructive consequences.</p> <p>The film intensifies her reflection on adolescent identity: it dramatizes the tension between aspiration to grow up fast and fear of losing the self.</p>	<p>You touched upon something, which was that you started looking at yourself, represented in them and what they were doing. I was gonna ask you, if you think that the character made you think about your own past or future in a different way?</p> <p>Yeah. Even if we were the same age when it happened and she stopped kind of a bit earlier than I did, I did see her hanging out with older kids and stuff, and I could see “them” as well. And I was also... there - I was a bit scared that that could potentially be me one day. It’s also one of the reasons why I also stopped being with them, because I was scared that if I continued, I would become more similar to them, and there - I really could not see myself breaking my own character and my own personality so far that I would become, as a person, like them. But it was a point of concern, I think.</p> <p>What is being them?</p> <p>I don’t know. It’s - for example - I would see many of my girlfriends at the age of 14 who were pregnant, or they were having kids at 16 or 15, and they had already had a kid and were pregnant with another kid from different parents, from different dads, or hanging out with kids - or guys - way older than that.</p> <p>That young?</p> <p>Yeah. Yeah. Like, that young. I couldn’t do - I couldn’t see myself, and they were again... I’d see them in the bathroom sniffing cocaine, or they’re sharing, like, pills with each other and stuff, still pregnant, and drinking on the weekends. And even if many of them are already getting better now, and even if they’re having their own life, it was still scary for me to see that, wait: “I’m not that far from them if you think about it”. If I did the one thing that they didn’t do, that started all of this, then I could be one second away from doing it. So I think that was what I was mostly scared of.</p> <p>Uhuh. So I’m trying to understand the connection here, well, I don’t know if there’s a connection - but was the movie a bit of a warning?</p> <p>I’d say so, because I actually saw it for the first time when I was really little, but I saw it when I was, I think, around 10 or 11. And then I saw it again a couple of years later when I was already 13 or 14, and I think that was kind of a waking point, because I could see myself kind of being trailed onto whatever the movie plot was, and because she started as, like, a normal girl that just wanted to fit in. That was what I’d see myself as doing, even if she went for it way earlier than I did. Though - not that I ever did - but she went, and I was scared that I was gonna go for it, that I was gonna go for that lifestyle soon. So, yeah, I’d say it was like a breaking point or warning. say it was like a breaking point or warning.</p> <p>Was there any point where you liked her lifestyle?</p> <p>There was, of course there were some aspects of it that I enjoyed. The freedom, the fact that she was kind of older than her years, I’d say. She was - even if not mentally - she was doing stuff that kids always want to do, because when you’re young, you want to be as old as you can get until you’re actually that age. So she - I could see her doing stuff that - oh, that sounds cool - like going, I don’t know, like going to parties a lot or going and having fun with older boys and stuff. I was like, oh, that would be fun to do. But when I grew up a bit more, I realised that that was not really it. But I think I kind of went to that - like, the good parts of it, of course, but not the..</p> <p>The bad parts</p>	<p>Strong fear of identity erosion; sees peers’ trajectory as a threatening possible-self.</p> <p>Concrete, shocking images of adolescence derailed; creates urgency in her own distancing process.</p> <p>Rewatching the film at different ages created new meaning: film functions as a developmental warning system.</p> <p>Ambivalent pull: attraction to the freedom and “older” lifestyle, tempered later by recognition of its dangers.</p>

Experiential Statements	Transcript	Exploratory Noting
<p>Fictional identification extends to parental dynamics, where the participant learns to reflect on her own behaviour and empathise with parents.</p> <p>The movie provides a sense of validation and universality: by recognising her life mirrored in fiction, she realises she is not alone in experiencing such raw adolescent struggles</p>	<p>Yeah.</p> <p>The bad parts made you think?</p> <p>That the good parts aren't really worth it anymore.</p> <p>So you think there was any way where it really affected your choices? Can you think back to choices that you made because of the character?</p> <p>I'd say the way she would be talking to her parents mostly. Because she was extremely rude, and for me, my family will always come first, and treating my parents right always comes first. And when you're a teenager, especially at the start of your teenage years, as a girl - that's what I know, as a girl - like, we don't really know how to express our emotions in a healthy way. And I'd see myself being rude to my parents, even if it wasn't at the level she was. It was still rude, and I totally still regret it to this day. But I would see myself, like, how she was talking to them. I think the biggest thing was when I could see how she was, like, treating her parents and how that would affect her parents. But her parents wouldn't show it in front of her. They would, afterwards, like, talk about it between themselves or stuff like that, and how that affected them kind of made me reflect - like, maybe my parents were also going through their own thing. Because of me or because of my brother, and things like that. So I think that kind of made me realize that it's not all about me, and maybe my parents are also going through it.</p> <p>So did the parents in the movie make you think about your own parents?</p> <p>Yeah. I'd say so. Even if they're very different people, thank God, I thought it was - I could see a lot of struggle that parents go through, and I never really thought about how parents are also living their life for the first time. They didn't know everything, and I would make my parents feel guilty that they didn't know how to deal with stuff, like, deal with me sometimes. And I could see that a lot in the movie as well, how the parents didn't know how to deal with a kid like that. I think that was one of the things.</p> <p>Mhmm. And how do you feel about that influence?</p> <p>Like, in what way? The influence of my parents or -</p> <p>No, the influence of the character and the interactions of the character on your life?</p> <p>I haven't really thought of the influence, mostly, as I thought more of the impact, but-</p> <p>Or the impact.</p> <p>Yeah. I think it was just like a moment of realisation. That even if I am not doing the hard drugs, even if I'm not going out with the older boys, if I think about it, in a way, our lives were quite similar. We were hanging out with kids that we shouldn't have been hanging out with. We would see everyone getting in trouble around me, and I would see everything, like, things way too raw that I shouldn't be seeing at my age. And that definitely changed her, like, mental development, and I think that it did a bit to mine. So that's where I felt almost more at ease when I saw the movie, in the sense of-if this movie is made, it means that I'm not the only one that's gone through this or is going through this. That's why I wasn't really that scared because I knew that it's not normal, but it's not super uncommon to see that. And even if it's not talked about enough in schools or stuff like that, it happens a lot.</p>	<p>Direct influence of character behavior on participant's self-reflection about her own actions toward parents</p> <p>Fiction opens perspective-taking on parents' struggles; moves beyond self-centered adolescent view.</p> <p>Film normalizes difficult adolescent experiences; provides comfort through recognition that her struggles are shared and represented.</p>

Experiential Statements	Transcript	Exploratory Noting
<p>Identification with Tracy operated ambivalently—as both a cautionary tale and a normalizing framework.</p> <p>Fiction shaped her desire for recognition, encouraging visible, “wild” behavior to be noticed, while also influencing family dynamics</p>	<p>It made it real?</p> <p>Yeah, it made it less bad in my eyes, for a bit.</p> <p>Less bad?</p> <p>Yeah, I think because I only stopped hanging out with them right before I came to OIS, so I was 14. And even then, I would still sometimes, after school, be with them. And I would just watch the movie, like, almost every other month. I just loved that movie because it made me feel like what I was doing was not as bad. Because if she’s doing it, and if she’s going through it, and I’m going through it – is it even that bad, because we’ve been doing it? So I think that’s mostly the impact.</p> <p>So at the same time that it was a cautionary tale, it also made it a bit normal?</p> <p>Yeah. Yeah. It was normal. It was almost like – it was normal that I was worried. It was normal that I was feeling the way I was feeling, but still normal that I was still doing it, even if I was still worried about it. Because I could see everyone else doing it. I could see people around me doing the same thing as she was. So even if I was worried, I wouldn’t be as concerned because they were also doing it. Yeah. I think.</p> <p>And do you feel like there were any characteristics of Tracy’s personality that you think you’ve incorporated?</p> <p>Like, later on? That I...</p> <p>Even in the moment or...</p> <p>I think just that I would try to be as, I’d say, wild as I could have. And I think I would try to put myself out there as much as I could so people could see me – and they could, like, notice that I was there. Which was not always good. And she did that a lot. She was trying to be the most popular girl. She tried to be the most quirky almost, and I tried my best to be that way. So I could – maybe – I don’t know – maybe I could be, like, not popular, but I could be noticed by as many people as possible. And I think that that’s the same. And also, again – the family interactions. Also with my brother. She’s also kind of mean to her brother, and she’s really rude to him. And the brother was the one that kind of cared mostly. And my brother, he could see it because we used to be in the same school. So he could see it more. And even if he wouldn’t bother bringing it up to my parents as much, he would be getting really mad at me, and I would just lash out and not really understand where he was coming from.</p> <p>Do you think you can discuss this a bit more – the noticing? What does this mean to you?</p> <p>Like – noticing?</p> <p>Yeah. Like the “I wanted them to notice me.”</p>	<p>Fiction as normalizer: reduces guilt/shame by framing behavior as part of a shared adolescent experience.</p> <p>Explicit acknowledgment of the ambivalence of identification: simultaneously warning and justification.</p> <p>Identification shapes performative behavior: adopting aspects of Tracy’s visibility-seeking personality.</p> <p>Fictional sibling dynamics mirrored in real life; character model informs self-other relational conflicts</p>

Experiential Statements	Transcript	Exploratory Noting
<p>Identification gave the participant a template for transformation</p> <p>Recognises a gap between performed and authentic self, realising that fictional identification shaped temporary behaviour but not enduring identity.</p> <p>The film's imagery continues to serve as a symbol of hope and recovery, contrasting with her own calmer, more authentic present self</p>	<p>I think mostly because since I was really young, I just looked different. Because I always looked really old - way older than all my friends looked. And it was like, being mixed in a mostly either Black or white school. I was kind of in the middle. And for me, coming from - my dad grew up somewhat comfortably - and coming from two very different shocking families, I never really knew how to fit in in a place. And also, I was quite bullied because of other stuff in my life. So when I finally kind of grew up a little bit, and I could see myself getting attention from people who never gave me attention before. I kind of wanted that attention as much as I could, because I guess I never had it as a kid. So I'd see myself grabbing it as much as I could, or trying to get it as much as I could. And I think that's the word - attention. I was trying to get what I never got years before, I think.</p> <p>Then the character was an expression of that?</p> <p>She was always, like, a reserved girl, also bullied as a kid, and then one day she kind of started to change everything and hang out with the wrong people. And after that, she started being known by everybody. People knew who she was, and she was an influence in the school. Even if I wasn't an influence in the school - because my school was way too big for that - I could still see that people knew who I was in my year, and maybe even in the block building where I lived. People in the streets would recognise me and stuff. So I guess that I liked that part.</p> <p>How did that make you feel? That popularity?</p> <p>I think it made me feel great. Like, I think most kids - even if they say they don't want to be popular - they want to be liked, they want to belong. And especially as a kid who never had that dynamic before, having that at that time really brought a lot of happiness and joy. Because I was really pumped that someone actually was noticing me and seeing me as a person - whoever I was portraying - rather than as the little kid that they didn't like before, the one they thought looked weird or something. So I think it made me feel good. It made me feel good. I liked it.</p> <p>Was it a faithful version of you?</p> <p>No. It wasn't me. I like to say that, especially now, I'm way calmer. I'm very calm as a person, and I'm more collected. I was the opposite. I've always been really quiet, really shy - even now, I still talk a lot, but I'm not super outbursty or anything. And I think that's where I wanted to be - I wanted to be that super outgoing, super crazy girl who knew everybody and talked to everybody. And that's not who I am. I'm usually more reserved. I have a small circle.</p> <p>So you think that you're very different from Tracy now?</p> <p>Yeah. Yeah, I would say so. I don't know how Tracy would be now, because the movie ended with her crying in her bed with her mom after everything blew up. And the colour slowly came back in the movie at the end.</p> <p>The colours came back?</p> <p>Yeah. It came back, like, as the movie ended, in the last scene. And I just don't know how she is now. But for me, comparing myself to the movie now - I wouldn't say we're polar opposites, but I'd say I'm really far from that. I still like to have fun, but never to that extent.</p>	<p>Early marginalization fuels later craving for recognition; fictional character resonates with this unmet need.</p> <p>Clear point of identification: Tracy's transformation from invisibility to recognition mirrors participant's desire to be noticed.</p> <p>Differentiation: recognition that her performed identity, influenced by Tracy, was not her authentic self.</p> <p>Closing image of the film remains vivid; color metaphor marks change and possible recovery.</p>

Experiential Statements	Transcript	Exploratory Noting
<p>The participant fuses fiction and life: the film's metaphor of colour returning becomes a way to articulate her own turning point after a personal loss.</p> <p>Identification is not only about warning or mirroring but also about providing symbolic language to make sense of trauma and recovery.</p>	<p>Was there any moment where you were, you know, metaphorically crying in a bed and the colours came back?</p> <p>I don't think there was - well, there was a moment. I think it was when my best friend - when he died. He got shot in London after a bar fight and stuff. And I never told my parents. For months, I didn't tell them. And I think when I had a big fight with my dad and I finally told him - that was when I kind of realised that things weren't really going my way. If my best friend was killed - so I think that's when I realised. Maybe it was after that fight I had with my dad that the light came back, because I realised that maybe this is the life that I should be living in. So I think that was more or less when I realised that I shouldn't be with the people I was with.</p> <p>Yeah. That's a big lesson.</p> <p>Yeah.</p> <p>Thank you very much for sharing that with me.</p> <p>Oh, it's okay. I'm pretty open about it.</p>	<p>Real-life traumatic turning point; anchors her reflection on change</p> <p>Uses the film's metaphor of colour/light to frame her own life</p> <p>Personal breaking point directly parallels Tracy's arc in the movie</p>

## Annex E - Xiaohua's Interview

Experiential Statements	Transcript	Exploratory Noting
<p>Fiction is not only consumed but experienced as formative, sparking creative ambitions.</p> <p>Engagement with stories reflects fictional identification as a developmental process, where meanings evolve as the participant matures.</p>	<p>So, I'm gonna start out with the first question, which is: can you tell me the type of entertainment that you usually like to consume? Whether that's, like, movies, TV shows? What are you drawn to?</p> <p>Most often, I think it's movies. Which doesn't include reading novels. Right?</p> <p>Yeah. Do you usually read novels?</p> <p>Actually, I have a lot of contact with fictional things. So most often should be novels and then movies. And thirdly, I think some American TV series. Do you know <i>Young Sheldon</i>?</p> <p><i>Young Sheldon</i>. Yes. The from the <i>Big Bang Theory</i>?</p> <p>Yes. Yes.</p> <p>Okay. Yeah. I think that's the main things.</p> <p>Okay. So you say movies, some novels?</p> <p>Novels, movies, and TV shows.</p> <p>Okay. And why do you think that you prefer consuming movies and novels over any other type of entertainment? What do you think draws you to them?</p> <p>Frankly speaking, I think they just have easier access to. Like, when you want to read something or watch something, you search on the Internet, and then you can just see directly. Because regarding watching, I can only think of others such as watching a ballet, watching a drama, and that is more costly, obviously.</p> <p>Mhmm, so like accessibility?</p> <p>I think so. Yes. And for me, I simply am a great fan of fictional things. So that's the main reason.</p> <p>So you're excited about it? Like, you're really drawn to it? Fiction is something that you like?</p> <p>Yes. Passionately. I also want to probably be, like, write some fictional things in the future too. So I think, reading and watching those can help me broaden my mind on what ideas and how to develop those things in fictional, you know.</p> <p>And have you had some ideas, like, you said that you would like to pursue that, fiction? Have you ever thought about, you know, drafts and things like that?</p> <p>I used to want to write children's stories. Because I think sometimes, for me, children's stories have even deeper meaning. And the interesting part is that children and adults may have completely different perspectives about the same thing, and they're both enjoying it. For example, <i>The Little Prince</i>. You have read that, right?</p> <p>I have read that. But refresh my memory.</p> <p>Okay. What I'm trying to say is that, the interesting part I find is that, as growing up, I can interpret the story in a different way. Like, when I was a child, probably, I just think, oh, the prince and the rose and the foxes are just characters in the story and they're friends and probably how the story itself is like. But now I can understand the meaning and the analogy underneath strongly.</p>	<p>Participant emphasises frequent exposure to fiction</p> <p>Clear personal passion for fiction,</p> <p>Aspirational link: fiction consumption tied to desire to create fiction.</p> <p>Example of deep engagement with fiction, showing reflection on how interpretation changes with age.</p> <p>Fiction provides a developmental mirror</p>

Experiential Statements	Transcript	Exploratory Noting
<p>Fictional identification enables participant to process personal experiences and cultural/familial expectations</p> <p>Through identification, the participant explores themes of authenticity and self-acceptance.</p>	<p>So your perspective changes throughout time?</p> <p>I wouldn't say necessarily, but mostly.</p> <p>And, when it comes to characteristics of stories, what are the characteristics you look for in fiction? Like, what type of stories are you drawn to? Are they dramatic? Are they comedic?</p> <p>Let me think for a sec.</p> <p>Yeah. Don't worry.</p> <p>I think I'm mostly drawn to something that reflects reality. And the characters need to be kind of complex, you know, because in real life, people are complex. It cannot be just one side, like, they're villains and they're just good people. That would be boring and really childish. And I remember the question in your questionnaire. I am also drawn to characters that I can relate to, like there's a movie in Disney called <i>Turning Red</i> and the main protagonist is an Asian girl, and I can really relate to how she feels in her family. So, yeah, that's also the kind of movie I'd like.</p> <p>What's her name? What's the name of the character in <i>Turning Red</i>?</p> <p>Her name is Meilin, I think.</p> <p>Meilin?</p> <p>Yeah.</p> <p>And can you tell me a bit about Meilin?</p> <p>So firstly, at the beginning of the movie, she has black hair. And at the time, she's like a teenager just going through puberty, and her mom has really high expectations for her. (...) When she tells her mom about her grades, she only tells those that she got A's. But those that she didn't get A's, she hides them underneath the bed; and she has a secret crush, the boy who is working at a convenience store nearby and she drew some comics herself about the boy, but she doesn't want her mom to find it, so she also hides that underneath the bed. And, like, what I'm trying to say is that, because of the high expectations, Meilin isn't showing the full of herself to her mom. Like, she only shows her the perfect part and conceals the part that her mom might not like. And for me, I think sometimes it is a problem of Asian parents. When I face my parents, sometimes their expectations are just so high and even though they don't limit me on a lot of things in my life now, still in my mind, sometimes I keep criticising myself, and I think it's because of the education I've had before. So yeah, I really relate to the character.</p> <p>You really relate to the character.</p> <p>Yeah. But in the end, sorry. (Rushes)</p> <p>No worries.</p> <p>It is a good end. Meilin and her mother just gradually have a better relationship because she knows how Meilin really is and what she wants, as a teenager. And I think the whole theme is also about accepting what we truly are, the good parts and the bad parts.</p>	<p>Preference for realistic, multifaceted characters</p> <p>Fictional identification is explicitly tied to personal resonance with cultural/familial dynamics.</p> <p>Participant draws direct parallel between character's struggles and their own lived experience.</p> <p>Fictional narrative used as a lens for self-reflection, linking identification to ongoing self-criticism.</p> <p>Meaning extracted from fiction aligns with identity development in adolescence</p>

Experiential Statements	Transcript	Exploratory Noting
<p>Fictional identification allows the participant to articulate the pressure of perfectionism, revealing how fiction provides metaphor and validation for personal struggles.</p> <p>Identifying with Meilin supports cross-cultural reflection: moving to Portugal broadens the participant's perspective on expectations and self-worth, contrasting with earlier internalised ideals.</p>	<p>You were talking about Meilin, right? And you were talking about some of the aspects you related to her. And what were they? Like, what is going through your mind when you say that, oh, I relate to Meilin.</p> <p>I think it's mainly about expectations. It feels like being perfect is kind of an ordinary thing. Like, if you try hard, you have to be perfect, and then it's just normal to be perfect and even not worthy of being complimented. And I think - I do not know why - but I think some Asian parents do think this way. So yeah.</p> <p>(They think) that it's ordinary to be perfect? That's what you said?</p> <p>Like, you just have to be perfect. It's expected. Is there anything you do not understand? (I think she thought my face was confused)</p> <p>No. No. I'm understanding you. I really just want to get your perspective on it. How do you feel about those expectations?</p> <p>I feel that (pause) I feel that they're restricting me in some way, because they put an idea in my mind of how perfect is like. So, you know, now that I'm here (Portugal) and I see more diversity in students, perfect can also be... it's not necessarily perfect. It's just you achieve things that you really want to.</p> <p>So... what was this question again?</p> <p>I was just asking you, like, what aspects of Meilin do you relate to?</p> <p>Oh, okay.</p> <p>But you were speaking about something that I think is relevant to you, which is the fact of expectations and the pressure that comes with it. And you were saying that now that you're with other people...</p> <p>Oh, yes.</p> <p>What happens? What do the other people represent when it comes to these things?</p> <p>It's not that something specific happens. It's just when you get to know more people, you see that a lot of people are still doing fine even though they don't achieve the highest in grades and just do things that you like and, I mean, it's your life.</p> <p>And was there ever any point where you were metaphorically hiding grades under your bed?</p> <p>Yes, absolutely. Let me see. I remember, before I came here, I was in an international school in Shanghai, and at the time, the pressure was kind of high. Sometimes I just did not feel like I had the mood to study, because I was already studying all day long. At the time we lived in the dorm, probably, in the evening, when we had the evening classes just to do self-study, I'd tell the teacher I'm a bit sick and I think I need to stay in the dormitory. I wouldn't tell her that emotionally or any other reasons I did not want to go, because that isn't really a reason that is accepted, I think. So, yeah, like, I can see it and I wouldn't tell these to my parents because they'd say, even if you meet blah blah blah, some difficulties, you need to overcome it and others are following the rule to go to the evening classes, so you have to go too. It's not a big deal, you can rest after the classes and stuff like that.</p>	<p>Perfection framed as baseline expectation</p> <p>Fictional identification highlights internalized parental expectations as limiting</p> <p>Exposure to different cultural norms reframes what "success" and "perfection" mean.</p> <p>Participant directly maps own experience onto fictional metaphor,</p> <p>Fictional storyline mirrors lived concealment and pressure to conform,</p>

Experiential Statements	Transcript	Exploratory Noting
<p>Fictional identification highlights the importance of peers as emotional stabilizers, showing how friendships buffer against parental conflict.</p> <p>The participant interprets the red panda metaphor as a symbolic expression of adolescent emotional turbulence, integrating fiction with lived experience to articulate inner conflict.</p>	<p>So yeah. And how do you feel that that's not an acceptable excuse?</p> <p>I think to some extent it is understandable, since it's a kind of traditional education. And I mean, even though that's an international school, I think those teachers are probably raised under that kind of education, and they do things according to how they were educated before. And I think it's also about how the school works. Like, if students don't go to classes for no reason, the teacher may be in some problem too. But for me, emotionally, I'd say it's kind of sad that emotions aren't really... what is the word? Like, valued as much as the grades. And I think they should know that people just deserve rest.</p> <p>Rest is important to you?</p> <p>Isn't it important to everybody?</p> <p>Definitely. Especially if you're being pressured.</p> <p>I think. Yeah. Yeah.</p> <p>I was also going to ask you, do you think that Meilin did things that you wished you could do?</p> <p>Hmm... Not really. Not really. Because I think the difficulties she encountered and overcame are very similar to mine. And the strong emotions during teenage time are kind of eased by staying with her friends. And I think that's also very similar to me. Like, it's just similar and there's nothing I can't really achieve, except for the part she becomes a red panda when she has strong feelings.</p> <p>Mhmm. Yeah. You can't turn into a giant red panda, right?</p> <p>(We laugh)</p> <p>Yeah.</p> <p>But speak a bit more about that relatability. So you're with your friends, it's like that she was also with her friends? Explain that to me a bit more.</p> <p>So the part that she became a red panda, I think, is like a metaphor when she has strong feelings and the kind of inner conflict during teenage times. And then she accidentally found that when her friends came to her and stayed with her, she could control whether to become a red panda or not. Like, she was very peaceful. And I think the company of friends for me is exactly the same, because during puberty time I think I did have a lot of disagreements with my parents. And those disagreements seemed to come out of nowhere, but I was just mad at those things happening. But whenever I talked with my friends and stayed with my friends, I was peaceful and everything seemed to go on a lot better even though the problem between me and my parents might not necessarily be solved. But emotionally, I was calmer and happier.</p> <p>They prevent you from turning red?</p> <p>To some extent, yes. But still, you know, it's a problem between two generations, not me and my friends. So it's just like an ease, they help me to calm down, but not solve the problem.</p>	<p>Participant expresses disappointment at undervaluation of emotions, contrasting academic focus with human needs</p> <p>Identification with Meilin framed as parallel experience, rather than wish-fulfillment.</p> <p>Participant recognizes fictional metaphor as symbolic of adolescence</p> <p>Friends provide emotional regulation, mirroring the fictional dynamic in <i>Turning Red</i></p> <p>Direct linking of fictional metaphor to lived experience, highlighting shared emotional dynamics.</p>

Experiential Statements	Transcript	Exploratory Noting
<p>Fictional identification with Meilin enables the participant to frame parent-child power dynamics through both cultural and emotional lenses</p> <p>The participant highlights how fiction externalises adolescent vulnerability in the face of parental authority, validating their own experiences</p>	<p>Uh-huh. And can you explain that a bit more, the difference in generations? I think you spoke a little bit about the teachers. Right? And maybe that they were taught in a certain way. Can you elaborate a bit more on that?</p> <p>Would you like me to talk about the generation of my parents and me or just in general, the difference in generations?</p> <p>I don't want you to talk about anything specifically. I think that it's really important that whatever you understand by my question, you speak freely. You know, I really want to stress that point that I was saying that there's no right answer. I really don't want you to cater.</p> <p>I see, so according to my understanding.</p> <p>Yeah. Yeah.</p> <p>So I don't really know how to explain that question because I think the difference in generations is firstly very unavoidable (long pause).</p> <p>Did the movie discuss that?</p> <p>Not a main theme.</p> <p>Not a main theme?</p> <p>It's mainly about the relationship, not like the generation gap.</p> <p>And what was their particular relationship, between Meilin and her mom? You spoke a bit about it, but can you explain a bit more?</p> <p>I think it reminds me of the power distance, which is one cultural dimension we learned in psychology class. Like, some Asian countries, their parents just have more... like, there's more power distance between parents and children. And when... I'm not very sure, but like, when her mom discovered Meilin drawing some pictures about her crush, she just dragged her to the convenience store and embarrassed her in front of all those clients in the convenience store. And showed the boy, oh, Meilin just thinks of you. Like, you, you said this is my daughter or things like that. And oh, I forgot your question again.</p> <p>I was asking if the movie represented that sort of difference between generations, and if that was portrayed in the relationship between Meilin and her mom. But you were on a current of thought. You were saying, okay, she discovered the drawings, right? And you were talking about some power distance?</p> <p>Yes.</p> <p>And did you see that in the movie? That power distance?</p> <p>I think so.</p> <p>Is that related to the difference between generations, that power distance? I want to understand that.</p> <p>Oh, I think it's not very closely connected with difference in generations. But what I relate to is that, when her parents embarrassed her in front of all those people, there seemed to be nothing she could do. She could just get mad in her bedroom and cry and... Yeah, I don't really know how to explain about the difference between generations because it's just... there are so many differences, and I do not know how to talk about it.</p>	<p>Participant uses cultural/academic concept to interpret Meilin's relationship with her mother.</p> <p>Focus on public shaming and parental control, experienced as power imbalance.</p> <p>Identification with helplessness under parental authority, connecting fiction to personal emotion</p>

Experiential Statements	Transcript	Exploratory Noting
<p>Fictional identification enables the participant to articulate the impact of parental control on autonomy and trust</p> <p>The participant draws meaning from fiction to highlight a broader theme: parents' emphasis on external markers of success overlooks adolescents' emotional needs and inner states</p>	<p>I understand, it's like a big thing.</p> <p>Yeah. Yeah. It's kind of too big and vague.</p> <p>Too big and vague. I get that. I understand that... And I was going to ask you if, specifically, do you remember if any of your personal struggles were related to Meilin? Like, specific personal struggles. You've touched a bit about that, but anything that you went through?</p> <p>When I was in year nine, in China, we have the entrance examination to high school, and it's like a really important year and a lot of pressure. That year there was COVID, and we had to do online classes, and my parents, since at the time my grades seemed to be sloping downward, my dad forced me to stay in the living room to study so that he could check on me from time to time. And there was a security camera in the living room and he could just check on me whenever he wanted in his bedroom. I was feeling very, very bad at the time because I think this showed he didn't trust me, even though he was trying to help me. That part I know, but still, that method didn't work at all because I'm a bit rebellious. The more he tried to force me, the less I was trying to really study under the camera. Am I answering the question?</p> <p>Yes, you're totally answering, yes. How does that pressure make you feel?</p> <p>I feel kind of helpless because I was already very sad because of the decrease of my grades. And my dad wasn't trying to understand what exactly happened to me during the time, but he only thought that, oh, if I keep an eye on her, then she'd study, then her grades would increase. But at the time, I think, what I needed more was some emotional support or just in general, some support and probably some conversations. That's all I can think about now.</p> <p>And did Meilin's parents do that to her, in some ways?</p> <p>I can't remember it in detail, but there was a time that her parents discovered she turned into a red panda, and then they just took everything out of her bedroom and put her in the bedroom and let her try to control the whole thing. I don't really recall a lot.</p> <p>That's fine. So they put her in the bedroom, right?</p> <p>Yeah.</p> <p>And they just kinda let her stay there so she could control her situation?</p> <p>Yeah.</p> <p>Are there any similarities between that and what was happening between your exams and your studying?</p> <p>I think it's like the parents don't care a lot about what exactly is happening, like, the well-being. But they care about the achievement and the things that are shown from the outside. Like, another example is that sometimes my bedroom gets a bit messy - it's not that messy - only a bit. My parents might say something like, oh, you need to clear things up and complain if I do not clear things up. But sometimes, what I feel is that when my mind is messy and I have no clue about some problems in life, my room gets messier too. It's like I have no idea why, but I think they are kind of related. And what they only focus on are the things that are on the outside. And when the room gets messy or when your grade is sloping down, you need to just make them turn back to the so-called considered good roads.</p>	<p>Participant recalls surveillance and control under academic pressure</p> <p>Fictional identification activates reflection on trust vs. control in parent-child relationships.</p> <p>Highlights emotional needs unmet by parental focus on achievement</p> <p>Participant sees parallel between fictional parental control and lived experience of confinement and pressure</p> <p>Symbolic connection between inner state and outer environment, linking fiction's metaphors with personal lived expression</p>

Experiential Statements	Transcript	Exploratory Noting
<p>Fictional identification helps explore how perfectionist expectations foster avoidance of failure, undermining authenticity and self-acceptance.</p> <p>Meilin's story provides a narrative model for understanding identity struggles, where pressure leads adolescents to hide flaws and detach from their full selves.</p>	<p>You would like for them to pay more attention to the mess in your head? Instead of the mess in your bedroom?</p> <p>If it were a few years later, I'd say yes. But now, I've already had the kind of thoughts that I cannot rely on them for that part. When I have some problems unsolved in my mind, I try to solve them myself, or try to seek help from other places because I just don't think... This might be a part of the generation gap. I do not think my parents understand that deeply. So even if I talk with them, probably they'd say, oh, oh, you're just thinking way too much or something like that. They might not be able to offer me advice even if they want to.</p> <p>And what were the expectations or the results that the parents of Meilin expected of her? Was it grades too? The results you were speaking about – the expectations. What did Meilin's parents want? Do you remember?</p> <p>They want a girl who has good grades and achieves something in her hobbies. I'm not very sure what hobbies she was doing, but it's not just enjoying the hobby, but winning the competition and dancing, stuff like that. And also their family had a temple for the red panda, and they want her to do extra work, like welcoming people who go into the temple on weekends. I think it's like they ask for a lot of things in almost every aspect of Meilin's life, and the parents have a definition of being perfect. And what Meilin has to do is to be obedient and just meet the demand.</p> <p>How do you feel about meeting that demand? Like, being perfect. How do you feel about that?</p> <p>I think it's stupid and unnecessary. Like, it's probably good for parents to have an expectation for children, but it's not like forcing them to meet everything. Because in the film, when Meilin cannot meet some expectations, like if she doesn't achieve good grades, she just hides the exam papers. I think that also causes the children to become avoidant – avoidant to their failure. Like, "I am the perfect one, and if I do something that does not meet the expectation, that's just not me." I think gradually, after Meilin hides her failed paper, it's not only just avoiding the fact that she didn't meet the expectation of her parents; it's also making herself avoid the true and the whole of her.</p> <p>But is she afraid to fail? Does that make her afraid to fail?</p> <p>I think so.</p> <p>You were saying she's afraid to be herself? Is that what you're trying to say?</p> <p>Yes, I think. At least she's not accepting the not-perfect part of her.</p> <p>Because I wanted to understand that position that you were saying. You were saying that, when the parents pressure her into being perfect, she's at the same time avoiding something. What is she avoiding?</p> <p>I think she's simply avoiding the failures.</p> <p>The failures?</p> <p>Yeah.</p> <p>What does failing mean to you?</p>	<p>Participant expresses withdrawal from parental support, turning to self or others</p> <p>Identification with Meilin highlights multiplicity of expectations placed upon adolescents</p> <p>Participant interprets fictional avoidance as a coping strategy, linking it to perfectionism and denial of failure.</p> <p>Fiction provides a way to articulate identity distortion under pressure</p> <p>Identification crystallizes around fear of imperfection</p>

Experiential Statements	Transcript	Exploratory Noting
<p>Fictional identification serves primarily as a reflective tool, helping the participant revisit and reframe adolescence</p> <p>Stories demonstrate how children's fiction carries layered meanings that resonate differently across developmental stages, supporting both adolescent and adult self-understanding</p>	<p>I think not being happy in my life and not achieving what I really want. If it was before, I might say some more secular values, but now I think I focus more on myself. Like, in the past, I might also fear that if I do not enter a good university, then my life is going to be a failure and stuff like that. But now I think there are just so many possibilities and things depending on luck in our life – just do things that follow your heart. And I think as long as I do that, I won't consider things a failure.</p> <p>Mhmm. Do you think that Meilin made you think about your past or your future in a different way?</p> <p>Yeah, she made me think about my past during the time I entered puberty and had the arguments with my parents. And I think that's all because now I've already developed a balance or a way of communicating with my parents. Mhmm. And they seem to focus more on their life too, not always forcing me with the high expectations.</p> <p>They all have their own life?</p> <p>Yeah. I think we are both evolving.</p> <p>Uh-huh (we laugh)</p> <p>And do you think that you can think about a time where one of your choices was directly influenced by <i>Turning Red</i>?</p> <p>Not really. Because I watched the movie last year, which is already a few years later than the experiences that I really relate to the character. So the movie doesn't really influence me.</p> <p>So it was mainly about puberty?</p> <p>I think so, and the relationship of children and Asian parents.</p> <p>Yeah. Because in the beginning, you were talking about your perspective on children's books and on children's movies, and that sometimes they talk about adult things.</p> <p>Yeah. I know. This is a different conversation, right? At first, I was talking about the fictional stuff, and then we were focusing on the film.</p> <p>But do you think that's in any way related?</p> <p>I think so. For almost all fictional things related specifically for children, I think adults can watch or read them too. They just have a deeper understanding of those things. And for children, they're merely looking at, oh, how interesting the story is and how the plot and the characters are like.</p> <p>Uh-huh. So you were able to find depth in <i>Turning Red</i>?</p> <p>I think so (long pause).</p> <p>And, do you think that you incorporated any characteristics of the character in your own personality?</p> <p>Can I ask what incorporate means?</p> <p>Basically to...</p> <p>Combine something?</p> <p>Yeah. Exactly. Take in.</p>	<p>Participant contrasts past fear of failure tied to external success with a present shift toward self-defined fulfilment</p> <p>Fiction facilitates retrospective reflection, connecting Meilin's struggles to participant's adolescence</p> <p>Recognition of mutual change between adolescent and parents, highlighting relational development</p> <p>Fiction here is less behaviourally influential, but significant in interpretive meaning-</p>

Experiential Statements	Transcript	Exploratory Noting
<p>Fictional identification supports retrospective meaning-making, enabling the participant to reinterpret past parental conflicts</p> <p>Fiction operates as a reference point for developmental transition (puberty), marking the emergence of autonomy and questioning of parental authority.</p>	<p>I don't think so. It's still about the previous question. I think I just watched the movie later than the time that I might relate to it most. For now, it's just, oh, the movie reminds me of my past, but it doesn't really influence my life now.</p> <p>So is there a difference between your past and now? Like, in that way? Because you're talking about something that was before.</p> <p>Oh, yeah. I think yes. Because a few years before... I don't know, it's just puberty things. The relationship between my parents and me was kind of strange and hard to find a balance. Because I think before puberty, most times when my parents recommended something, I would automatically think that, oh, they are my parents so what they say is likely to be true. And they are trying to give suggestions that are good for me. So I simply believed and did as they said. But after a certain time, you develop your own thoughts and question some of the things they think.</p> <p>Mhmm. Do you look at that part of your life as somewhat separate?</p> <p>I think, yeah. Probably. Because from my understanding, puberty just makes you more mature – physically and mentally. So yeah. Probably just changes because of hormones.</p> <p>So you think you're a different person?</p> <p>No. No. Not that kind of big change. It's just a time that can somehow divide if you want to divide. Like, not necessarily, but something for reference.</p> <p>Can you explain that a bit more? I don't understand that.</p> <p>Not really dividing. Just the time that you find many things are changing and that's all, but not really that big change that makes you a whole different person. Not like that. Not like that.</p> <p>Okay. Because I was just trying to understand it because you were saying that you had a bit of a distance from the movie because you watched it last year. And it seemed like you were implying that the movie gave you some different perspective on things that happened in the past. Is that true?</p> <p>Not like different perspective. Only relating to it.</p> <p>Only relating to it. Okay. Yeah. Okay. Okay</p> <p>And, like, rethinking about what was happening. Because before that, you know, when things just happened, you won't have a clear conscience about everything.</p> <p>You don't have, like, clear eyes? A clear view?</p> <p>Yeah. I think.</p> <p>Was there a different way you looked at a specific issue after watching the movie?</p> <p>(Takes pause to think)</p> <p>I can also talk about novels, right?</p> <p>Yeah.</p>	<p>Fiction functions as retrospective recall rather than current guidance.</p> <p>Fiction helps contextualize shift from dependence to autonomy during adolescence</p> <p>Participant frames adolescence as a marker of transition, but not a radical rupture.</p> <p>Fiction serves as a mirror of recognition rather than transformation.</p> <p>Fiction allows for retrospective clarity about earlier experiences.</p>

Experiential Statements	Transcript	Exploratory Noting
<p>Fictional identification provides recognition, but also guidance through alternative perspectives, offering adolescents possible models for action and coping</p> <p>The participant underscores fiction's general formative influence, shaping thought processes and problem-solving approaches.</p>	<p>No matter in movies or novels, sometimes you may see some situations that you have been through too or are going through now. And you see their opinions and how they respond to the situation. Just sometimes you haven't thought about that, and you might say, oh, that's a wise way of dealing with it, and you try it yourself.</p> <p>So they show you a different way to act? Is that it? A different pathway?</p> <p>Yeah. And sometimes, like, make me think about the whole situation or the methods that I'm taking. I'm trying to think of a specific example that I haven't thought of yet. A character? A character that made you think in a different way?</p> <p>I had an example, but I cannot explain it very detailed now because I read the book a month ago, and my memory isn't very good (takes long pause).</p> <p>Sherry, it's totally okay if you don't remember.</p> <p>Okay.</p> <p>It's totally okay.</p> <p>I guess I cannot really think of a specific one now.</p> <p>It's totally okay. I think that you've given me a lot, and thank you for sharing.</p> <p>You're welcome.</p> <p>Yes, thank you for answering my questions and answering them honestly.</p>	<p>Fiction functions as a source of alternative strategies for coping and action</p> <p>Fiction encourages self-reflection and reconsideration of one's own approaches to problems.</p>

## Annex F - Nathan's Interview

Experiential Statements	Transcript	Exploratory Noting
<p>Participant shows strong character attachment, rewatching a series revisiting a favoured character's, indicating emotional investment.</p> <p>Books provide imaginative expansion and practical modelling, allowing the participant to experiment with communication strategies and apply them to real-life relationships.</p>	<p>I think this is all good. Okay. So, let's start off with the first question, which is: what type of entertainment do you usually consume? Like movies, books, TV shows, anime, whatever, like, what do you like to watch?</p> <p>At the moment, I'm really interested in certain books and movies. I've been watching a series called House of Cards at the moment. It's sort of the only series I've been watching. I get to a point where the character I adore, sadly leaves the series because of some legal issues in real life. So yeah, I just keep rewatching that series.</p> <p>So TV shows and books?</p> <p>Yes.</p> <p>Why do you think that you prefer, like, one over the others. Why do you think that you like TV shows and books? What pulls you to them?</p> <p>Well, books allow me to run more varied scenarios in my head. They allow me to kind of expand on a thought or on a statement, for example. I can expand on that information. I can use my critical thinking as well to figure out, for example, if I'm reading a book of communication, I could expand on that thought about how would I make an audience feel convinced in what I'm saying and just feel immersed in the presentation I'm giving.</p> <p>Uh-huh. So it's about communication?</p> <p>Yes.</p> <p>So you read the books, and what does a book allow you to do related to, like, imagining? Can you, like, expand a little bit on that?</p> <p>For example, if a statement is given, I can then build on that statement in terms of how would I, for example, use a specific communication technique to strengthen a relationship.</p> <p>Okay. And do the books that you use are usually about that communication?</p> <p>Yes.</p> <p>Okay. Is that communication is it important to you?</p> <p>Yes.</p> <p>Okay. Why?</p> <p>Why? Well, I think it's important for me to actually have strong relationships throughout my life and so, building relationships now as a as a sort of foundation for friends and meaningful relationships with family because, at the moment, my family is in The UK and I'm here based with a friend. And so communication is really important to to not lose touch.</p> <p>And you think you use the books to help you with that?</p> <p>Yes.</p> <p>But sort of like, a routine? Like something that you go back to? Like something that you can hold on to? It's like, oh I read the technique and that it keeps me grounded?</p> <p>Well, I tend to remember certain information if it's important to me. If it's something I need to change. Something I go back to, I wouldn't say so. But, I definitely do enjoy reading that type of genre of content.</p> <p>And, do the TV shows like influence this in any way? Like the communication?</p>	<p>Shows attachment to a character; continues rewatching despite their absence.</p> <p>Highlights imagination and mental simulation through books.</p> <p>Applies fictional/ educational content to real-life relational goals</p> <p>Explicit link between media consumption and personal relational development.</p>

Experiential Statements	Transcript	Exploratory Noting
<p>The participant demonstrates aspirational identification, projecting character's perseverance and determination into their own self-concept and goals.</p> <p>Fictional identification merges with personal biography: improbability of adoption and survival is reframed through the lens of the "making the impossible possible" narrative</p>	<p>Yes, they do as a matter of fact. So House of Cards, it's... So the character that I I'm speaking about is called Frank Underwood, a member of congress in The United States, starts out as a secretary of whip, and he is on his way to become the president. And this this theme of communication is just fascinating to me. It's fascinating. And this character, his personality is about mental fortitude. It's about perseverance. And you get to see not just triumphs but also the tribulations of what could actually be or happen to a congressman in the US. And just to notice that even even people that may, we know to have the best of communication styles do have flaws. But also that that's that's another reason why people love them for example, it shows it shows character it shows a little more transparency. Take Donald Trump, for example. He isn't, I would say, the most political sort of poker face person. So what he what he thinks in his head sort of comes out. And the American public or the Republicans gobble it up. Because they feel as though they've built a connection with someone who's like them even though he's not the type of them. Yeah. Yeah.</p> <p>It's funny that the two people that you mentioned, Donald Trump and Frank Underwood, they're great communicators. They communicate really well and they have an ability to convince. Does that make sense?</p> <p>Yes. Yes. That does make sense.</p> <p>So you're talking about communication. And does in any way, does Frank Underwood help you communicate better?</p> <p>Frank Underwood is is a benchmark for me to set my standard of character. So, mentally, I take much better... I prioritise my health physical health more than he does. So, but, yeah, it's it's it's the character that really draws me into that that sort of ambition, determination, and the work ethic as well to set a goal without not necessarily knowing how to actually achieve it. But then through the trials and tribulations, he's able to achieve it based on not only his intelligence, but determination, his character.</p> <p>He can bend bend things to his will?</p> <p>I mean, one of the lines he said was, I'm secretary house whip, I make the impossible into a possible. Which I find is is just like, that's the sort of person I'm going to become to make the impossible possible. Because who would dare to even think about changing something that seems impossible?</p> <p>Uh-huh. Who who would even dare? Why is that important to you? Why do you think that that line resonates so much with you?</p> <p>Well, from my background, so I was born in South Africa and then I was a adopted and then, thankfully, I've been able to travel the world, lived in different places, different experiences. And, it's enriched my perspective of the world and of people that I meet and cultures and such languages I've learned as well. And it's knowing that I had probably 0.001% chance being adopted. My sibling and I were the last children- last children-that were adopted from that center, from that place. So the fact that it was even me means that, of course with luck, but with my preparation and work ethic I can actually achieve anything. Because the chances of me being here is probably incalculable. So that that's what really drives me is is that even though, even though the chance of success is slim, it's still there. That means it can still happen.</p>	<p>Admiration for character's resilience and depth; exposure to flaws adds realism and appeal.</p> <p>Uses fictional character as a personal model for ambition and determination</p> <p>Explicit identification: adopting a fictional line as personal mantra.</p> <p>Connects personal life narrative of improbability to fictional inspiration of overcoming the impossible.</p>

Experiential Statements	Transcript	Exploratory Noting
<p>Fictional identification involves aspiration and bewilderment: the participant admires Frank's communicative power but is perplexed by his relational decisions.</p> <p>Identification is not passive imitation; the participant actively negotiates between what he wishes to emulate and what he finds beyond his current grasp.</p>	<p>If you can dedicate your life, like, if you can give your life for something, you know you're in the right path. Is that basically what you're saying?</p> <p>Yes. <b>If I think the cause is good. Positive. Yeah.</b></p> <p>Mhmm. And, do you think that Frank did things you wished you could do?</p> <p>Yes. He does do some things I wish I could do. Let me think of something. Okay, so, what he has is, <b>when he speaks to an audience, people are drawn to what he says.</b> That's something that I also admire. <b>What else? He doesn't have a family (says is like he had an insight).</b> There's one thing. When his wife, Claire Underwood is feeling a bit misunderstood. I can't remember the name of this other character. Call him Chris. Chris is writing a book about Claire Underwood and Frank Underwood. So he's with them a lot of the time also writing Claire Underwood speeches that she gives out on campaigns and such. And Chris and Claire end up sleeping together. Frank at first, he knew, he knew what was going on. He just felt it. And then when he asked Claire about it, then her reaction just made it certain. And, he said something along the lines that, if it made Claire happy, then do so. Do set boundaries. And that sort of understanding, and courage, sort of bewildering. But he did it for something bigger than himself.</p> <p>What was the bigger?</p> <p>Or for his wife's case. I mean, <b>to love someone enough to let them sleep with another person is something I don't understand at the moment. Maybe I'll grow into it. Maybe I'll understand it at some point, but I don't.</b> Yeah, so that that is sort of a mystery, but, yeah, that that sort of certainty.</p> <p>Certainty?</p> <p>Yes.</p> <p>Why do you think that he did it?</p> <p>Why?</p> <p>Yeah.</p> <p>He was probably scared about Claire leaving him. Yes. So he's he's sort of the the frantic one. Claire is more of the relaxed, sort of comforting person in a relationship. Which is very valuable to Frank because they were together since a very young age. Yeah.</p> <p>So it's not love that keeps them together? Or is it a different kind of love? Right? It's not necessarily the romantic kind of love, but the partnership kind of love.</p> <p>Yes. It's a it's a partnership kind of love in in a way.</p> <p>Like, we're partners. We're in this together. We don't necessarily have a romantic relationship and we have kids, but we hold each other down. Is that true?</p> <p>Yeah. Exactly.</p> <p>Yeah. Okay. Okay. And you were you were speaking about something before, which was this was the things that, you wished you could do. You were talking about communication and the way he holds some, like the audience's attention. What does he do? Like, I don't remember. Like, what does he do to hold people's attention? Why do you think that he's so like such a good communicator?</p>	<p>Success is linked with willingness to sacrifice for a meaningful cause.</p> <p>Identifies specific admired trait: powerful public speaking</p> <p>Participant pauses, realising an important difference between himself and the character.</p> <p>Struggles with grasping Frank's unconventional relational choices; acknowledges gap in personal maturity/ understanding</p>

Experiential Statements	Transcript	Exploratory Noting
<p>Experiences Frank's speeches as mentor-like guidance, drawing him in.</p> <p>Identification is critical and selective: admires eloquence, rejects moral corruption.</p>	<p>The way he speaks, the pace, the accent has a lot to do with it.</p> <p>Uh-huh. Because he's like southern. Right?</p> <p>Yes. Yes.</p> <p>He is. He speaks in a twang.</p> <p>Yeah. He does.</p> <p>Right?</p> <p>Yeah. Yes. And it's very, very serious. Yes.</p> <p>How do you feel because sometimes there's those experiences, whenever a character delivers a monologue. You know what I mean? Like, they do it, like, a speech or something like that. How do you feel in those moments? I know Frank does that.</p> <p>Yes. Yes. Well, he obviously pans to the camera a lot as if he's talking to the people, the viewers. And how do I feel about that? Was that the question?</p> <p>Yeah. Like how does it make you feel?</p> <p>Sort of as if you were a student following a mentor, in a way. Metaphorically speaking as if you're there, figuratively. Boom(?) Yes. Yes. Yes.</p> <p>Like he's speaking to you?</p> <p>Not exactly to me, but in a way, the viewers do feel involved.</p> <p>It encapsulates your attention?</p> <p>It it does grab your attention.</p> <p>Mhmm. And do you think that you've seen any of your personal struggles reflected in Frank's story? Anything specific?</p> <p>(Long pause)</p> <p>I don't think there are any parallel issues he had to to mine. No. I can't I can't think of anything that's like I've been through that.</p> <p>What about any, intellectual dilemmas or moral dilemmas? Because you've talked a lot about your character, the personality. And, do you think there's any comparison? Anything that comes to mind?</p> <p>Intellectual. Well, obviously being smart does help. But he also has a right hand man, which is Doug Stamper. Who helps him, you know.</p> <p>Do you have a right hand man?</p> <p>At the moment, no. Morally he's corrupt, which is something I am not going to indulge in. Yeah. It's just blatant greed.</p> <p>He's greedy?</p> <p>Yes, he is. For example, one of the things at the beginning of the show, there's a journalist called Zoe Barnes and she turns up at his door with a little bit of blackmail, just a photo of him looking at her backside as she walks by at some gala or some some event. And so she shows the pictures of it, and she kind of asks herself in his house, even though his bodyguard advises against it. They kind of sit down, have a talk, and Zoe is trying to convince him to be his personal journalist. So if he wants anything sent to the press.</p>	<p>Attentive to delivery style; identifies communication as central</p> <p>Positions Frank as a mentor-like figure when addressing the camera.</p> <p>Acknowledges partial sense of being addressed directly.</p> <p>Denies personal narrative parallels.</p> <p>Rejects Frank's greed and moral corruption.</p> <p>Example used to illustrate his manipulative, transactional nature.</p>

Experiential Statements	Transcript	Exploratory Noting
<p>Fictional identification involves observing corrupt power dynamics</p>	<p>Like a liaison.</p> <p>Yeah, yeah, yeah. Send to the press, then she'll publish it, and mainstream media will will just craze over it. <b>And that was that was (her) downfall because Zoe got greedy.</b></p> <p>She got greedy?</p> <p><b>She got greedy, thinking that she was actually the one with the power,</b> so at times it started off against small problems. She would or they would agree to meet one at Zoe's apartment or at another place, museum for example, and she would then not turn up. And obviously this will be make Frank very angry because someone he works with doesn't appreciate his time. And...can I have a tissue? Like, do you have tissues?</p> <p>I don't have tissues, but I can get you one. I can get you one from the bathroom. Give me one sec. I'll get you. I don't hink I have any here left. I'll get you one for the bathroom.</p> <p>Don't worry Seth.</p> <p>Thanks. It's all good, man.</p> <p>Here you go.</p> <p>Thank you. Cold outside.</p> <p>It is very cold outside. But, yeah, you were saying he would need her, right, and she wouldn't show up. And you were contrasting this with her morality, hers or his?</p> <p>Well, Zoe grew to think that she was the one that held the power and she was mistaken because it's Frank, he's a politician. And then, <b>Frank and Zoe continued their, their, their relationship which included sexual intercourse,</b> and that's why Frank Underwood would give pretty juicy news for her to publish. And then <b>one day Zoe decides that she doesn't want to have sexual intercourse with Frank,</b> and he takes this the wrong way. <b>Saying, if you want a professional relationship, then so be it.</b> So when in future she asked for, you know, some news or something she can post before her competitors. He gave very vague or useless answers. And so that that one of them, one, Zoe realised that she was not the one holding the power, but two, that also aggravated her. So further along in the series, when Zoe asks about a a murder case that Frank was involved in, but she doesn't know that. She's only speculating, which is the the the wrong step for her. Speculating that in a in an apparent suicide, not a suicide.. What was Ross, he was trying to be a governor of a state. Failed miserably. He was an alcoholic and a sex addict. Was in the car, drunk out of his mind because he messed up an interview prior. Had then turned on the car and closed the garage, killed himself, fumes and toxins and stuff. Frank was the one who encouraged him to drink, turn the key on and closed the garage, so it looked like an apparent suicide, but Ross was not in the driver's seat. That was Frank's mistake. So someone was in the car with him, as he obviously wasn't driving. And so Zoe Barnes, kind of speculates that in the in the police report, Ross was not alone. And she she kind of indicates that she's heading towards Frank as one of the suspects. Obviously, Frank doesn't take it the right way, and so he agrees, he gets Zoe to agree (to meet) at a train station. In a very discreet corner, and he lures Zoe Barnes away from the public.</p> <p>In the subway station?</p> <p>Yes. In the subway station. And they start talking. Frank, I'm saying along the lines here, but Frank goes along the lines of, <b>I need to know I can trust you if we are going to have a true professional relationship.</b> So he makes sure that she can trust him. <b>By...and this is a ploy. By making Zoe delete his number, messages, any proof of contact with someone on her on her phone.</b> And Frank then, once it's all done, he's literally seen it from around the corner that all the evidence has disappeared.</p>	<p>Identifies Zoe's downfall as misjudging power dynamics with Frank.</p> <p>Highlights manipulation and transactional nature of their relationship</p> <p>Repeated impersonation as symbolic alignment</p> <p>Details Frank's control and strategic removal of evidence</p>

Experiential Statements	Transcript	Exploratory Noting
<p>Immersion in fictional narrative intensifies moral reflection.</p> <p>Ambivalent attraction: he is fascinated by the character's boldness and moral transgressions, which provoke his own reflections on the limits of morality</p> <p>Identifies with ambition and determination, while distancing from corruption and violence.</p> <p>Fiction functions as a moral testing ground for negotiating boundaries</p>	<p>All the contact between him and her?</p> <p>Mhmm. And so he provokes Zoe to say something that would irritate him. So he starts to leave as if he's gonna leave, but Zoe doesn't want him to leave. So she goes after him. There's a train coming, bear in mind. He turns around, pushes Zoe onto the train rails, and the train comes by, obviously kills her. That's a problem done. But the thing is, Zoe's friends are suspicious and they start going after Underwood, but after Zoe's death, one of her friends, who is also a journalist, decides to move, go away because she she claims she she has fooled around with politicians, but Frank was dangerous and he literally killed Zoe.</p> <p>Her friend said this about her?</p> <p>Yes. And then the the the sort of process of trying to find out if Frank was really one of the suspects kind of halts. But then it boosts itself into the future as the sort of collage of horrible things he's done along with Claire. It's it's not a, a legacy of admiration. Although he was ambitious, I mean, he did get things done. But the manner in which he did it was, distasteful.</p> <p>I was gonna ask, how does this contrast with your morality?</p> <p>Mhmm. Frank's?</p> <p>Yeah. Because what you just described is someone that's willing to do whatever it takes to get what he wants. And, I was gonna ask you about your own, like, stance on that.</p> <p>Whatever it takes in the right manner. And you have to really, really calculate whether the outcome is worth your morality. If it were a really good cause, for example, if Martin Luther King had to commit some sort of corrupt act for then, the world to enjoy communication with each other. Because he would have to get through politicians. He would have to get through activists and other public figures. In my view, that's that's a good enough cause. To work towards, not in the expense of your morality, because you are doing it not for ill intention, but for good intention. And it was good. It's not as if he thought it would be good and then it was bad.</p> <p>What ended up happening? Was it good for him? Like after he killed that reporter?</p> <p>His situation kind of halted with the reporter, but then loads of other issues came into play and with the ripple effect, news of of his suspicion of killing Zoe Barnes was was let out into the open.</p> <p>Really? So what happened? People knew and found out that he killed her?</p> <p>No, they don't.</p> <p>They didn't find out? Okay. Sorry for my confusion.</p> <p>Just a suspicion.</p> <p>Just a suspicion. It sounds intense. This is an intense show. Yeah, I was gonna ask you if you think that any of your choices were directly influenced by Frank.</p> <p>Any of my choices? Is that a more specific sort of aspect?</p> <p>It can either be... well, I really don't wanna funnel your answer, but, it could be obviously personal things, but, it could also be, like, character wise, you know, like you saw something, you decided. I really don't wanna put you down a path, but I don't know if you understand what I'm saying.</p>	<p>Participant recounts the pivotal murder scene in vivid detail, showing strong recall and immersion.</p> <p>Distinguishes between admiring ambition and rejecting corrupt, violent means</p> <p>Frames morality as conditional: actions justified if intentions and outcomes are truly good</p> <p>Establishes a personal ethic of ends justifying means only when intentions are noble.</p> <p>Pauses, signalling uncertainty about direct influence of Frank on his own decisions</p>

Experiential Statements	Transcript	Exploratory Noting
<p>Selectively incorporates fictional traits into his self-concept. Fiction functions as a frame of reference for future thinking</p>	<p>Yeah. Well, as a standard of character in terms of mental fortitude, that's something I admire as well as ambition. To improve my communication skills, that's one. Yeah yeah i'd say so.</p> <p>And do you think that you were able to incorporate characteristics of his in your own personality? I guess in the lines of what we've been discussing.</p> <p>We are different people and he's fictional. But to apply the same attitude towards work and meaningful relationships I think. I think. Yeah. That's how we relate.</p> <p>How would you summarise his attitude? Just to understand a bit more, like, what what is his attitude towards work and personal relationships? And then how does yours come into play with that?</p> <p>Well, for one, Frank goes to in the ghetto because he has a friend, not a politician, but a friend friend, who cooks some barbecues and ribs and he loves that and though he may be among the top 1% of wealthy people in the US, he still goes to that place in the ghetto (emphasis on this word) for his ribs and barbecue with his friend. Yeah, that's something which would be parallel to my case, which would be if I moved country, to... to still maintain a solid friendship with those friends. Yeah. So when I go back, it's like nothing's changed.</p> <p>Go back to the UK or to...</p> <p>To go back to any place.</p> <p>And you still maintain those relationships?</p> <p>Yes.</p> <p>That's important to you?</p> <p>Yes.</p> <p>And you feel like he did that? So even though he was in Washington and he was "creme de la creme" when it comes to his professional career, he was still able to go back to the ghetto and hang out with that guy and eat barbecue. And you would like that in a way, metaphorically speaking?</p> <p>I mean, yes, yes. I think I would do that.</p> <p>We've been, you know, talking and you've mentioned Frank and Martin Luther King, and they're both political figures, one fictional, one not. But you think that this has peaked your interest in politics. You, you talked about wanting to influence, like the world and have a good influence on the world. Do you think that any of this plays out in any way?</p> <p>Plays out?</p> <p>Yeah, like do you think that it influences you in any way?</p> <p>I think it influences the perspective from which I view things in the long term. That's short term.</p> <p>So it makes you think about your future?</p> <p>Yes. Uh-huh.</p> <p>Is your futures in any way related to Frank, for example? Would you pursue a career in politics? In what ways is it related to the future?</p> <p>No. I wouldn't pursue a career in politics. That's not my thing. But the orientation towards long term thinking to prevent disorder is something I've adopted.</p>	<p>Explicitly names traits he admires and seeks to develop in himself.</p> <p>Recognises the character's fictionality while selectively applying traits to real life</p> <p>Highlights Frank's loyalty to friendships despite status; draws parallel to his own desire to maintain connections when moving countries</p> <p>Acknowledges that Frank shapes his orientation toward future thinking</p>

Experiential Statements	Transcript	Exploratory Noting
<p>Ends with reinforced value of organisation as a pathway to success, echoing traits admired in Frank</p>	<p>Learning to adapt in certain situations when something doesn't go to plan, but not be so ill prepared that everything is disordered, that you are not organised.</p> <p>Be prepared to not be disorganised. Is that it?</p> <p>Yes.</p> <p>Do you think you like being prepared? Is that very important to you?</p> <p><b>Yes, yes, shows the best results.</b></p> <p>Mhmm. Well, I think we're done.</p>	<p>Emphasises preparation as central to success and outcomes.</p>

## Annex G - Sofia's Interview

Experiential Statements	Transcript	Exploratory Noting
<p>Books are lived as spaces of imaginative participation, where the adolescent can shape characters and worlds.</p> <p>Popular fiction series provided models and narratives that resonated deeply in early adolescence.</p>	<p>So let's see if this is recording. I think it is. I think it's starting. Okay. I'll just put this in a big volume. Okay. So hi.</p> <p>Hi.</p> <p>Again. Yeah. So I basically just wanted to ask you, what type of entertainment are you drawn to when you look at, like, movies, TV shows, books? Like, what do you think you enjoy the most?</p> <p>Probably, when I was younger, definitely, like, TV shows. But also books have always had a really, big impact on my life because my parents were so enthusiastic about me reading. So I really... and I also really enjoyed reading from a really young age. So I think probably at the moment, books, I would say, probably is where I get most of my entertainment from. But...</p> <p>Yes. Sorry.</p> <p>I also do watch shows and movies, so I do enjoy watching TV shows, but sometimes I get bored of them. So and I forget about watching them. So...</p> <p>You get bored?</p> <p>Yeah. Sometimes I'll just get bored of a TV show if it's long and drawn out, and sometimes it doesn't leave much up to the imagination, which is why I enjoy books more. Sometimes, because it's more it's kinda more fun for me.</p> <p>Yeah. I was gonna ask, like, why do you think that you prefer books? What what what draws you to books?</p> <p>Particularly the part where I get to make up my own ideas in my own brain about what certain characters might look like or what certain places might be or what could happen and what doesn't happen. And there are certain holes that my own brain can fill in that if, for example, it's visual, it's harder for me to create my own ideas. And I also really like it because the books that I choose tend to be ones that are specific towards my liking, and they're exciting, and they're they're well thought out and plotted, and I like the plots especially as well, so things like that.</p> <p>And, like, what type of, plots and what are you drawn to, like, when it comes to that?</p> <p>Mostly fiction, I would say. I have tried to read a few nonfiction books, and it's just a bit more boring, I would say in a way. But, I really enjoy fiction novels that have to do with either dystopian futures or fantasy lands or adventures or just actual real life basis as long as they're fiction. I kinda read a lot of different, genres within the fiction world. I really like book series. When I was younger, I used to have an obsession with Harry Potter or The Hunger Games, which are really classics, or Percy Jackson, for example. But then, also, I've started to really enjoy, like, more mature novels and older ones or...</p>	<p>Books framed as formative, not just entertainment</p> <p>Books chosen for the freedom to imagine and co-create</p> <p>Engagement with iconic adolescent fiction; suggests strong identification with these worlds.</p>

Experiential Statements	Transcript	Exploratory Noting
<p>Even with complex, detailed texts, the adolescent experiences reading as an act of personal interpretation, shaping meaning beyond the author's intent.</p> <p>Dystopian and mature novels provide both challenge and resonance, allowing exploration of heavy social themes while still fostering imaginative engagement.</p>	<p>What are some of the mature novels that you like?</p> <p>I really enjoyed reading <i>The Grapes of Wrath</i>, even though it was bit of a it was difficult to read at the same time. Because John Steinbeck, the way he writes, is a bit, sometimes, wordy and very it's very thought out, which I which I enjoyed reading, but it was it was difficult to read also at times.</p> <p>Wordy?</p> <p>Wordy. Yeah. It had a lot of... it was very poetic almost in a sense because he used a lot of, like, "describery" words, adjectives, and stuff like that, that well, embellished really the setting as well because it's a specific moment in time. But it was just it felt very heavy and very, very detailed.</p> <p>Did it not leave space for imagination?</p> <p>It still did because it's all about the way that you visualise it in your own brain. Because, while he was very detailed, I could still fill in some gaps that were left behind or if I thought something was a different way, then I could still visualise it in the way that I expect it to be based off of the details that were given.</p> <p>Can you explain that a bit more? What do you mean by that?</p> <p>So I could, like, I could read the details that were specifically written in the book, and the way that I perceive it in my mind could honestly be different from the way that he intended it to be. But, I mean, I guess I'll never know because</p> <p>You (intelligible)</p> <p>Yeah. Exactly. And then...but that's basically that. What else have I read? I've read a lot of, I read I started reading Margaret Atwood and her novels as well. I tried to read, <i>The Handmaid's Tale</i>. I haven't gotten far in it, to be honest. But it's it's another very mature, very heavy book with a particular dystopian future that is, it's heavy, you know. It's, it's very it's a it's kind of a loaded topic and a loaded subject, that book. But it's really interesting, and I really enjoyed it, thus far. And then also other dystopian novels. Like, there was one that I read by Stephen King that was, like, a science fiction. That wasn't one of his famous ones. It's one of his newer ones, actually, that I kinda forgot about. But I, I actually really enjoyed reading that. It was it was more modern, so it was more relative to my time, my period, I guess. So that was fun to read as well.</p> <p>Why do you think that, you enjoy, like, this fantasy and dystopian world? Like, what do they make you think about? Like, why do you think you like it?</p>	<p>Engagement with mature literature; recognition of complexity as both a challenge and a source of enjoyment</p> <p>Emphasis on personal interpretation; highlights imaginative agency even with dense texts.</p> <p>Drawn to dystopian narratives; recognition of their weight and seriousness.</p> <p>Relatability to present-day context enhances identification.</p>

Experiential Statements	Transcript	Exploratory Noting
<p>Fiction is experienced as both an escape from monotony and a reflective space that provokes questioning of one's own reality</p> <p>Identification with strong heroines provides a mirror for aspects of self (e.g., love of reading, valuing education), showing how characters anchor personal identity.</p> <p>Culturally relevant fiction intensifies the sense of recognition, linking personal background with fictional narratives</p>	<p>Honestly, because maybe it's it can be a little bit fun to escape the monotony or the ennui that I can experience in, like, everyday life. And almost imagine what could be, in these different lands that the author creates. Because particularly dystopian it's like you can almost see it in real life because it's based off of real life, but then it's different. And it's and it's kind of fun to escape the life that you're living for a moment just to explore a different world almost. And then you can almost gain some perspective from it as well. Which I think is really interesting because it makes you question a lot of the reality that you're living in, almost. And it makes you think a lot.</p> <p>I I I think it it makes me think a lot at least. And then also fantasy worlds are really fun. They're like because they're they could be either kind of similar or nothing like the reality that you're living and that can be really fun to explore in in certain moments as well. And sometimes it can be a little bit difficult to project yourself in a different time period. For example, like, when you read in history about, oh, the medieval times, sometimes it can be difficult to imagine yourself in those moments or something like that. But with a novel, I feel like they what they convey really well is the idea of projecting yourself into a different reality that isn't your own.</p> <p>They place you there.</p> <p>Yeah. Uh-huh.</p> <p>And, like, you talked a little bit about the series that you liked and the book series that you liked, and what are some of your favourite characters? What jumps to mind?</p> <p>Probably really unapologetic heroines. Heroines in in in in story novels. Ones that, have, like, a lot of, strength in their own convictions and belief in themselves, I would say. Like, for example, probably one of the most, nostalgic ones for me is probably Hermione Granger. Particularly because it was the first book series that I ever read through the whole way, and that was really exciting for me. And she was just such an interesting character. And I had also really enjoyed school ever since I was little, so connecting her to that connecting that character to myself was fun. And I don't know. I kinda saw parts of myself reflected in her. I wouldn't say everything, obviously. But I definitely saw some of like, my love for reading was reflected particularly in that character that she created. Or, but there's other characters too. Like, I really enjoyed reading Percy Jackson when I was younger, and Annabeth Chase in particular was another character that I could relate to on some pretense, I guess. Mhmm. And but, also, as I've, there's I've read more fiction novels that were set in more of a modern day life as well. There was one that I read called, it was actually, I forgot. But no. No. No. I remembered. It would there was one that I read that was called "I'm Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter." And that one was particularly really impactful on my life just because it related to my culture more as well.</p>	<p>Reading as escapism; fiction used to break from everyday ennui</p> <p>Fiction as a tool for reflection and critical thinking about real life.</p> <p>Clear articulation of fictional identification; being transported into another world.</p> <p>Identifies with strong female characters; resonance with her own traits (love of school, reading).</p> <p>Ongoing identification with characters in different series; relational points of contact.</p> <p>Cultural resonance deepens identification; fiction connects to personal identity.</p>

Experiential Statements	Transcript	Exploratory Noting
<p>Adolescents are drawn to flawed and morally complex characters, as these reflect real human contradictions and make identification more authentic</p> <p>Fictional characters like Hermione provide validation of personal traits (intelligence, love of school), while also modelling growth and resilience, shaping the adolescent's own aspirations</p>	<p>I would say. And that character, that heroine, and that story was was flawed, which was really fun to kind of experience because sometimes in some fantasy novels that are especially written for younger readers, they forget to make sometimes a morally flawed character, I would say. And so, also, like, as you read more mature novels, I read I'm reading this book series also that's called that's written by Sarah J Maas. That's the what series is is it? It's not A Court of Thorns and Roses. It's, it's the Throne of Glass series. The heroine is really unapologetic and is has her convictions and sticks to them, but she's also a morally flawed character, which kind of creates this gray area around this character. But that's what makes her so compelling and interesting because she's not a perfect person, because it's more reflective of real life, I would say. Sometimes we can be morally flawed people in real life. And, obviously, not to sound cliché or anything, but black and white is not really we live in shades of grey or whatever it is, whatever that, cliché is. But so those are some of the characters that I am particularly drawn to.</p> <p>What was the name of the of the character that you said the the the my perfect Mexican daughter? What was her name? Do you remember her?</p> <p>What was her name? I think her name was Gabby. Gabby? Gabby. I think so. I might be mixing them up because I read two very similar novels. And then the one from Sarah J. Maas, her name is Aylin.</p> <p>And, well, why do you think that Hermione is so interesting? Why do you relate to her?</p> <p>Well, I wouldn't say I relate to her as much as I did when I was younger, just because I've developed as a person and I've changed a lot. But, when I was younger, I thought she was so interesting because she was so she was really she was well, she is I don't know. She's a character, but she's incredibly intelligent. And I thought and when I was younger I really enjoyed school just like she did and I thought that was particularly relatable as a person. Especially because sometimes the cliché of nerds being like losers or whatever. But in reality, she made me think that, oh, they're not really. They're really interesting. And she has a lot of depth. Like beside behind the fact that she really enjoys school and is a bookworm, there's also the depth to her character about understanding the complications of life and of being who she is. And she grew a lot over the series as well, I would say. Like her storyline was, I think, really good because she went from someone who sticks to the rules a lot to someone who was willing to bend them if necessary or break them if necessary. And you just kinda saw that progression throughout the the the series. And I thought that was really interesting because it reflected, like, a growing person. And I guess my goal is to always be growing as a person in some way or another. Like, whether it's from learning new knowledge, like Hermione would do when she was younger. Or by growing because she understands more of the world and how she lives in the world and how she fits into it.</p>	<p>Attraction to complexity in characters; values realism and nuance over idealised heroes</p> <p>Fictional identification linked to authenticity; flaws make characters relatable</p> <p>Early self-recognition in fictional characters; validates own traits (intelligence, love of learning)</p> <p>Fiction challenges stereotypes, offering alternative identifications.</p> <p>Character development inspires personal growth; identification becomes aspirational</p>

Experiential Statements	Transcript	Exploratory Noting
<p>Fictional narratives of rule-bending and moral justification resonate with adolescents' developing sense of ethics and social critique, extending from personal to political reflection.</p> <p>Characters who navigate cultural tensions provide validation and guidance, helping the adolescent negotiate ambivalence toward their own heritage and identity.</p>	<p>So her morality changed?</p> <p>Morality, I don't know. Perhaps, maybe. Mhmm. But I would say her perspective definitely changed.</p> <p>Her perspective. Yeah. Because can you explain a bit more about this, like, bending the rules? She was saying, in the beginning, she wouldn't really bend the rules and she would follow things. And by the end of the book, she was a bit more...</p> <p>She was Yeah. She was willing to bend the rules.</p> <p>Why did that speak to you?</p> <p>If she saw it morally justified, for example. If it was justifiable and if she had a good reason for it, it was okay to bend those rules. And I think that spoke to me because, well, rules are...not that I break the rules, but I think it's totally fair to say if it's morally justified, you can break the rules, which is, I think, essentially where protest comes from, you know, in a political sense as well. That, rules are there to be protested and not just to be followed, to be changed, and to be and I think that kind of can reflect a more in, like, in a more political global sense, like, from a character perspective to, like, a global world perspective about rules in particular.</p> <p>And, why do you think that you related to Gabby? You were speaking a little bit about culture.</p> <p>Because well, I am I am I am I am Mexican. But I related to her because she was she kinda went against parts of her culture that she didn't agree with, which I think is fair. But she also connected with parts of her culture, which I also think is really fair. Because sometimes I struggle with connecting with that identity of myself. Maybe because I don't live in Mexico or maybe because I don't speak Spanish at home or something like that. So sometimes it can be difficult to identify myself with that culture, so seeing that reflected in a different in a character is kind of almost helpful to realise it's okay not to identify specifically with certain parts of your culture, or it's okay to reject parts of your culture that you don't agree with as well. Because that's kind of the journey that she went on where she disagreed with some parts of her culture and spoke about it. And, in in in that book, they explored that idea through tragedy and through, like, life in general because it's a very it's a fiction, but it's very set in, like, a modern day life. And</p> <p>What's the story? Can you can you give me a little bit of...</p>	<p>Identification with character who question authority; links personal interpretation of fiction to broader political and moral reflection</p> <p>Fiction as a mirror for cultural ambivalence; validates selective identification with aspects of heritage</p> <p>Reading becomes a way of working through cultural identity struggles; fiction normalises ambivalence and negotiation of belonging</p>

Experiential Statements	Transcript	Exploratory Noting
<p>Fictional stories of identity and cultural struggle resonate deeply, providing a parallel framework for the adolescent's own negotiation of belonging.</p> <p>Cultural identity is experienced as layered and sometimes conflicting—cherished traditions coexist with rejected norms, while language and appearance complicate self-recognition.</p>	<p>Her sister dies and her family is kinda shot her to pieces. And her sister was supposedly, like, the perfect daughter. Stayed at home, only went to community college, took care of her parents, that sort of thing. But then they find out a lot more about her sister through, like, secrets that were revealed. That kinda shows that she wasn't perfect and so she goes on this journey trying to find out who her sister really was. And in the process, she kinda finds out who she is, I would say. It's like a very big, identity journey that she goes on. And that identity is so tied to the culture that they that they live in because they're a Mexican American family. Of, like, Mexican parents living in The US. So that was that was it that was an interesting journey to accompany her on because you saw as she moved throughout the world trying to find the pieces of her sister that were left behind, she also kind of found out what it really meant to be herself in the culture she lives in and where she lives.</p> <p>And you were speaking a bit about the aspects of the culture, like, what are the aspects that you relate to and the ones that you don't?</p> <p>Well, I would say that, for example, like, in Mexican culture in particular, I really love the food. I think it's one of the biggest aspects of culture that I relate to. And I love the sense of family and the the the loyalty that you have towards your family. But there are certain parts of it that maybe I don't agree with. Like, there's kind of a stigma that daughters in particular should stay at home, not go to college, make sure they're there to take care of their parents and their older age. And while that can be fair in some instances, it can be limiting as well. And for example, I don't connect with that. Another thing probably would be that, only my dad speaks to me in Spanish. And I only have that connection to my culture, really, because I've never lived in Mexico. And I would say that sometimes that can be interesting because as someone who's bilingual, it's it's confusing sometimes to identify yourself in a language that you only speak with one other person in your family and in your everyday life. Because especially, like, in Portugal, I speak Portuguese. Or with my mom, I speak English. It's only with my dad that I would speak Spanish. And so there's that part of my culture that I kinda struggle to identify with. And also just the relative ideas of what someone should look like if they fit to a specific culture, and, when I was younger, I used to struggle with that a lot because my mother is American and my dad is Mexican, so I felt that I always looked too much American and not enough Mexican, in particular, because I lived in California where there's a big Mexican or, well, Hispanic American community or Latin American community. So sometimes it was hard to identify myself with those specific people or to feel like, am I living the life that every other person who's Latin American lives? Because I am very privileged. I go to a private school. It's it's an incredible privilege that not a lot of people have. And there's also kind of this stereotype of Mexican American families are poor working middle class. And I don't really feel it fit into that category, at all. But I don't think that necessarily diminishes my identity. It just doesn't fit into the stereotype, I guess. But I used to, like, question my own, I guess, "Mexicanness", almost in a way, in in my culture.</p>	<p>Strong link between narrative and identity formation; fiction mirrors the adolescent's own developmental journey</p> <p>Positive cultural anchors; aspects of heritage embraced</p> <p>Rejects restrictive cultural norms; fiction validates resistance</p> <p>Language as a fragmented connection to culture; identity negotiated across multiple tongues</p> <p>Struggles with cultural belonging and stereotypes; fiction helps navigate in-between identity.</p>

Experiential Statements	Transcript	Exploratory Noting
<p>Fictional characters negotiating cultural authenticity resonate strongly, affirming the adolescent's own struggles with belonging and physical/cultural markers</p> <p>The heroine's journey becomes a metaphor for adolescence itself: not a single pivotal event, but an accumulation of experiences that gradually reshape identity</p>	<p>Did Gabby go through similar struggles?</p> <p>Yeah. She did. She questioned whether or not she fit in whether she was too American for her mother or whether she was, by leaving home, by going to college, whether she was kind of rejecting her own family ideals and family culture and values. And that was resonating to me. And also, she, the character as described, by the author, didn't look like how her mother looked, which was, like, really dark, really dark eyes, long dark hair and stuff. In the book, the the author describes Gabby, the the heroine of the story, as someone who was wither than her mother and looked more American than she did Mexican, which I, in particular, really related to that.</p> <p>You were saying that.</p> <p>Yeah. To that specific moment. And I and I kinda saw myself reflected in her in her values. And in and because she rejected some of the cultural values that she didn't agree with. She questioned her own identity and questioned whether she was good enough to fit into that culture just because she rejected some ideas. Which I think, like, some ideas that I don't identify with, can kind of, reflect itself in in in the heroine's journey, I would say.</p> <p>What is the heroine's journey to you?</p> <p>Well, in that particular novel is finding herself, I would say. And being willing to move on with her life after a tragedy that occurs and willing to forgive herself for not being the stereotypical perfect. So I would say that.</p> <p>The stereotypical perfect.</p> <p>Yeah. Of that culture in particular, which means staying at home, not going to college, finding a husband to marry, like, being a good cook, be taking care of your parents, you know, that kind of thing.</p> <p>Do you see yourself reflected in these existential issues?</p> <p>Sometimes. Yeah. I would say. Like, fight like, especially because in a dull instance, you question your identity all the time and your identity is constantly well, in psychology, we know that our cons that our identity is constantly changing because of the experiences that we go through. So, in that book, she went through this big experience, this whole ordeal, this tragedy, this journey that really shaped her identity and who she wants to be. And, well, adolescence is really like that. While I may not have, like, a specific pivotal moment, there are many little moments that kinda add up along the long run on the long run to really shape and change my identity, which is kind of why, I guess, I don't relate as much to characters that I once did.</p>	<p>Identification with Gabby's struggle to balance independence and cultural loyalty</p> <p>Physical appearance as a marker of belonging; fiction reflects participant's own sense of in-betweenness</p> <p>Fiction validates doubts about cultural authenticity.</p> <p>Identification with resisting restrictive cultural ideal</p> <p>Reflection on adolescence as an ongoing identity formation process; ties lived experience to psychology</p>

Experiential Statements	Transcript	Exploratory Noting
<p>Fictional identification is not fixed — it shifts across adolescence, with early attachments giving way to more plural and flexible identifications.</p> <p>While past identifications evoke nostalgia, the ability to relate to a wider range of characters is experienced as liberating, reflecting personal growth and the embrace of multiplicity.</p>	<p>Okay. Explain that a bit more what do you mean?</p> <p>Like like, I don't relate as much to Hermione as I once did. Like, when I was younger, I really I saw myself reflected through her a lot more. But that's because I hadn't explored other other aspects of my identity and as I've grown older and experienced new things, I feel like sometimes that I relate to other book characters more or not as much as I once did.</p> <p>And how do you feel about not, you know, relating so much to Hermione anymore?</p> <p>I mean, in a way, it's kind of sad nostalgia because she was such a big part of my life when I was younger. I mean, I was obsessed. I really I really felt myself reflected through that character. But honestly, now I would say, it's kind of almost liberating because I can see myself reflected in so many other different characters. It's not putting it's like not allowing myself to be encapsulated by a specific character in a specific box. So it can be liberating to, like, allow yourself to be multifaceted, to be like an onion, have multiple layers, you know? Don't yeah. I guess that's kinda what I would say.</p> <p>What is this being put in the box?</p> <p>Like, fit into a specific character stereotype, for example. Like, Hermione was a specific character stereotype when she was younger, I would say.</p> <p>And you really identified with her in a sense, but did you feel like you were being put in a box?</p> <p>I mean, that could be my own doing just because I was looking for someone to relate to. But sometimes, if you if you believe that you reflect someone so much, like I, I think I would say that I put myself in my own box of, like, oh, I have to be like her. I have to be like her. But then, like, I guess now that I've grown older, I've kind of realized how multifaceted I really can be, and that I don't necessarily have to relate specifically to every single part of her. You know? And that I can relate to more than just her. I can relate to other characters. I can empathise with other characters, and I can see myself reflected in other characters as well.</p> <p>And, can you explain to me a bit more about the the Percy Jackson one? Because you you said there was a girl in Percy Jackson?</p> <p>Yeah. So there was Annabeth Chase, which was...</p> <p>Annabell Chase?</p> <p>Annabeth.</p> <p>Annabeth. Yeah.</p> <p>Okay. Annabeth Chase.</p>	<p>Fictional identification changes with personal development; characters that once felt central lose immediacy as identity evolves</p> <p>Emotional attachment to past identifications; fiction tied to formative memories.</p> <p>Growth leads to plural identifications; movement away from single 'box' toward multiplicity</p> <p>Recognition of earlier self-limitation through identification; maturity allows more nuanced, flexible engagement with characters</p> <p>Identification now broader, more fluid; fiction facilitates empathy and layered self-understanding.</p>

Experiential Statements	Transcript	Exploratory Noting
<p>Adolescent is drawn to multifaceted characters whose evolving traits reflect the complexity of real identities, resisting stereotypes.</p> <p>Series fiction provides a developmental mirror — as characters grow across books, the reader traces parallels to their own evolving journey, reinforcing identification through age and stage alignment.</p>	<p>She was a really fun character to explore as well. Because well, she was really strong. She was both smart and strong. Like, strong in her convictions, but also strong physically, I guess. But, because, well, her character wasn't just smart. She was also, like, a warrior in in the in the novels. She was like a warrior. She could fight, like, no one else, you know. And so that was interesting to explore for me as I grew older, as well, because she wasn't just smart. She was more than just smart, and, you know, and she was described as beautiful, and she was described as, amazing, about fun, adventurous, witty, but, you know, all these different things that, that maybe, perhaps, other characters are just one, and she was, like, multiple different ones. So that was that was fun because she that because she also kind of grew up in her her series because it was a long overarching series that, you could see her grow as a person too. So,</p> <p>She evolved.</p> <p>Yeah, with the books, which is helpful because I mean we're always evolving as well. So, when your characters can kind of reflect that evolvment, it's exciting because you know that you're growing, and you know that you're changing. So if book characters can reflect that, it's it's relatable, you know.</p> <p>Do you think that any of these characters made you think about your own journey and how you have evolved through time?</p> <p>Probably, yeah. I would say so. That a lot of characters because because I read series in particular I can actually see kind of almost tangible evidence of them growing. In specific lines or in specific quotes of, oh, you can see how different she was from from the first book to the third or from the first to the seventh or something like that. So, I would say that as I grew older, I could also see myself reflected in those differences that they changed or well evolved into.</p> <p>How did, how did Annabeth and how did Gabby grow throughout the series? Because you talked a little bit about Hermione.</p> <p>Yeah. Gabby was just a singular book. It was just one journey.</p> <p>Okay.</p> <p>But Annabeth, she was young when the first book was written, I guess. Or well, when she was first described, she was 12, I think I was she was. And when I first read it, I was also her age. So I saw myself reflected in that. But then, because I went through the book so fast, she eventually got to the age of 17. And at first, I couldn't relate to that at all. Because I hadn't reached that moment in my life yet. But now that I am 17, it's kind of almost like I'm remembering everything and it's like, oh my gosh, I'm her age when the book series finished. I can see myself in her now, you know? Because</p>	<p>Attraction to multidimensional characters; value placed on complexity over singular stereotypes.</p> <p>Identification tied to seeing fictional growth as a mirror of personal change.</p> <p>Long narratives provide a temporal mirror for the adolescent's own development.</p> <p>Age alignment deepens identification; fiction experienced as life-stage parallel</p>

Experiential Statements	Transcript	Exploratory Noting
<p>Fictional resilience and adaptability are internalised as models for the adolescent's own sense of perseverance and self-change.</p> <p>Extraordinary fictional experiences are interpreted as metaphors for real-life growth, translating grand narratives into everyday identity formation.</p> <p>Fiction fosters both imaginative play (powers, fantasies) and aspirational goals (martial arts), extending identification into embodied possibilities.</p>	<p>How do you see yourself in her?</p> <p>I probably see, like, she's really hardworking, and I have a really good work ethic or work I I like to think I have a good work ethic at least, And she doesn't really how do you say... (something in Spanish) Doesn't give up.</p> <p>Doesn't give up.</p> <p>Yeah. She doesn't really give up. Whether it's, like, actually fighting monsters, which is the fictional setting of the book, or it's just, like, literally just going through life and not, you know, not, letting her own self be lost and rather allowing herself the space to adapt and change and become someone who she wants to be, I guess. Which I think is really fair because we always have to adapt and change, and by seeing that progression of both her age but also her identity was interesting because, she adapted and changed to the environments that she was in and the experiences that she went through. And so you could see, like, how really really impactful experiences that I can't relate to in everyday life, like fighting monsters or something. But you could see on, like, a magnified level almost, how this big giant experience affected every facet of her. And while I haven't had that big giant experience necessarily of actually fighting monsters, again, it's kinda like those little moments that kinda all add up to make that almost big pivotal moment where you can see yourself changing and really different from who you once were. So.</p> <p>And do you think that, either Hermione or Annabeth or Gabby did things that you wish you could do?</p> <p>Can you ask that again? I'm sorry.</p> <p>Sorry. I asked if you think that any of the three characters that you mentioned, do you think that they they did things that you wish you could do?</p> <p>I don't know. I mean, when I was younger, I used to wanna have powers. Like every other kid, I guess. But, so that was I mean, I guess I wished I could do that.</p> <p>What powers?</p> <p>Really any, honestly. Uh-huh. But I I particularly like the water. So I was like, oh, if I could control ocean water or something like that, that would be really cool. And I used to pretend that I could, but I but I can't, unfortunately. But, so or something like that or just I I also really wanted to learn to do martial arts at one point, but then I kind of got distracted and I've never learned because I thought, oh, if I can fight like them, that would be really cool too, you know? Because in particular, Annabeth, she was like a warrior in her book series. You know?</p>	<p>Identifies with perseverance and adaptability; sees fictional character as a model of resilience and growth.</p> <p>Fiction as metaphor; extraordinary events mirror everyday adolescent challenges in amplified form.</p> <p>Recognition of identity development as cumulative; fiction provides a symbolic framework for understanding change.</p> <p>Childhood fantasy and wish-fulfillment through fiction; imaginative play extends identification.</p> <p>Fiction inspires embodied aspirations, linking identification to possible selves.</p>

Experiential Statements	Transcript	Exploratory Noting
<p>Fictional characters' life milestones serve as aspirational mirrors, connecting imagined journeys to the adolescent's own anticipated transitions (e.g., university, independence).</p> <p>Fictional worlds are perceived as spaces of exploration and growth — like traveling — offering opportunities to reflect on self and identity, while real life remains valued.</p>	<p>But also in in Gabi, like, I guess I'm coming to the point where well, Gabi went to university, and it and I'm almost up to that point. And.. Well, I haven't done it yet, but I really want to. And I really want to go to university and I really want to kind of experience that and and she got her driver's license for example. And I really want my driver's license as well, you know. Which is kind of like little mini things that I that I wish that I could do. Because, well, I mean, I'm not old enough to get my driver's license yet, and I'm not quite there. I'm not done with my schooling to attend to university yet. Those kind of things, I guess, I would say as well. And sometimes I wish that, I wish that I could experience kind of the world that they were living in.</p> <p>Why why would why would you want to experience the world?</p> <p>I don't know. I think it would be cool. I mean, the way that the idea the way that the author, like, described the world the worlds, I guess. I think it would be kind of cool to it's like exploring a new place. It's like adventuring in a new place. You know, it's traveling essentially. And that's how you learn about the world. Right? So I guess it could, like, if I could travel to these fantasy lands that were made and explore them, then I could learn more about, like, the world, I guess. And, like, the perspectives and my own self, I guess. Because, well, that's... if I think about it, those specific settings, those worlds that the authors created is where the characters experience their growth and experience their identity change. And while I've experienced this in, like, my world and my reality, I guess it could be interesting if I observed what could happen if I was in theirs, you know. But honestly, I really like the reality that I'm living in as well right now. And I don't really wish to change it. Mhmm. If anything, if I could just visit it, almost like traveling, you know.</p> <p>Yeah. Like a simulation?</p> <p>Yeah. I don't know. Simulation? If I could go inside my own head almost and, like, go into the world that I, like, thought it might be like, I think that would be really cool.</p> <p>And, you know, you were you spoke a little bit about the personal struggles that Gabby went through. Do you think that, you know, any of the other characters, like, had personal struggles that you also related to?</p> <p>Yeah. I think so. Let me think. It's been a while since I've read those particular series.</p> <p>You have a great memory, though, because you remember everything really well.</p>	<p>Identification with concrete milestones; fiction anticipates near-future transitions.</p> <p>Fictional worlds imagined as forms of exploration and learning; curiosity about self through alternative settings.</p> <p>Recognition that setting shapes character development; sees growth as context-dependent.</p> <p>Balanced stance: values real life while still yearning for imaginative travel; fiction supplements, not replaces, reality.</p> <p>Desire for immersive identification; fiction blurs into personal imagination.</p>

Experiential Statements	Transcript	Exploratory Noting
<p>Fictional narratives of independence and vulnerability resonate with the adolescent's own struggle to balance self-reliance with the need for support.</p> <p>Monsters in fantasy become metaphors for real-life stressors (identity struggles, time pressure), showing how fiction provides symbolic language for personal challenges.</p>	<p>Thank you. I mean, Annabeth kind of these personal struggles that she went through well, she was kind of trying to distance herself almost from her, like, the shadow that her mother imposed on her. And also she was trying to prove to everyone that she was independent enough, and that she didn't need anyone because well, I mean, in her novel, she had been hurt by the people who were supposed to, like, protect her, like her parents and she didn't feel that protection from her parents. So so I guess kind of the struggle that she the journey that she really went on was trying to prove to everybody that she's independent enough and that she is good enough, but then she also kind of realises that she is allowed to ask for help. She's allowed that forgiveness. She's allowed that grace and that she can also she can be independent and ask for help. And I think that's really powerful because, I would say I'm pretty independent. I mean, obviously, I'm not fighting monsters, but I mean, I take care of my own responsibilities and stuff. But it's perfectly okay to ask for help when you need it. And I think that's really really help like, it's really true and it's particularly reflected in a school setting. If you don't understand something, you ask. Right? Even if you are supposedly, oh, I'm the best one in this class or I'm the best one in this class. So economists, it might feel like you can ask for help, but really you can. And you're allowed to be independent and have your shortcomings, you know.</p> <p>Do both.</p> <p>Yeah.</p> <p>And, you said I'm not fighting monsters, but, are there any, like, metaphorical monsters?</p> <p>I mean, sometimes I kinda have my own problems with my own identity. So I guess maybe that might be a metaphorical monster. Sometimes I have a problem with my own time, and I feel like there's not enough time in the day. And that could, like so so I have to organise everything and stuff. Also, because I don't have a lot of time in the day, I guess. Well, it feels like I don't at least. Because either I'm studying or I'm training, so it's always either one or the other.</p> <p>What do you train?</p> <p>Triathlon.</p> <p>Triathlon.</p> <p>Yeah. Yeah. And it's...</p> <p>Really intensive training.</p> <p>Yeah. And it's, like, twenty hours a week. Twenty hours of, like, like, treinos a week. So it's, like, a lot. It's a lot. So sometimes, like, the monster that I fight is just not having enough time. And it's just, like, running after the time and trying to, like, grab as much of it as I can almost. Yeah.</p>	<p>Identification with balancing independence and vulnerability; fiction affirms that strength includes accepting support.</p> <p>Personal learning mirrored in fictional journey; school context used as real-life example.</p> <p>Explicit connection between fantasy struggles and internal psychological challenges.</p> <p>Fictional monsters reinterpreted as time pressure and identity stressors; metaphors link stories to lived constraints.</p>

Experiential Statements	Transcript	Exploratory Noting
<p>Fictional characters serve as companions across time, reflecting past experiences, present struggles, and imagined futures.</p> <p>Identification extends beyond reading into embodied practices (e.g., dressing up as characters), reinforcing emotional connection and personal integration of fictional figures.</p>	<p>And, do you feel like these characters made you think about your past or your future?</p> <p>Both, really. Like, for example, Gabby makes me think about my future a lot, like, because she went to university, and I'm almost at the point where I'm going to university. And that makes me think about what do I wanna do with my life? Who do I wanna be, you know, in the future?</p> <p>And then Hermione kinda really makes me think about my past because, well, she like, Harry Potter is set in the world where they go to school from, like, 11 to 18. Right? And I've kind of gone through that phase, you know. Now I'm trying to see what more is there, you know, almost.</p> <p>Stages.</p> <p>Yeah.</p> <p>Is it like the characters accompany you through your life?</p> <p>Yeah. I would say so. Because, like, in stages of my life, I reflect I, like, found myself more related to the character, particularly if I was reading that book series at the moment. And because, I guess Harry Potter was probably well, I think it was the first ever long book series that I read, like, in a row. Because I read Roald Dahl when I was little, but, like, extra long, like, chapter books like that. That gave you real satisfaction. That was the first one that you finished. And that was really exciting for me. And so for, like, a long time, for for maybe, I think, three years, I was really stuck on that character. And then I started branching off and reading others other series. Like, I read the Hunger Games, and I really enjoyed that as well. I dressed up as Katniss Everdeen for Halloween as well. You know? I always yeah. I think another thing, kinda going off on this tangent, but I always dressed up as book characters for Halloween. Always.</p> <p>Okay. Yeah. But explain that. So you always dressed up as... who did you dress up as?</p> <p>Oh, I dressed up oh my gosh. I forgot. But I dressed up as Hermione Granger. I dressed up as Katniss Everdeen. I dressed up as Annabeth Chase. I dressed up as Violet Baudelaire. I dressed up as someone from a movie, actually. Which was, La Muerte from The Book of Life.</p> <p>La Muerte? Okay. I think I know it. I think I know it.</p> <p>Which is yeah. Uh-huh. But that was when I was really young and then... well, I mean, I haven't really dressed up much in the past couple years. But yeah. So, like, yeah. Because I went I dressed up as Artemis at one point too.</p> <p>Artemis is...</p> <p>Is a Greek goddess.</p> <p>Ah, okay.</p>	<p>Characters function as temporal anchors; fiction facilitates reflection on both past and future self.</p> <p>Identification evolves across developmental stages; characters accompany growth.</p> <p>Fiction tied to formative milestones in reading and identity-building.</p> <p>Embodied identification; adopting characters through costume expresses attachment and internalization.</p> <p>Cultural connection through character embodiment; identification extends beyond books into lived practices</p>

Experiential Statements	Transcript	Exploratory Noting
<p>Embodying characters through costumes offered adolescents the freedom to temporarily <i>become</i> someone else, extending fictional identification into lived play.</p> <p>Striving for accuracy in costumes reflects a desire for authenticity and closeness to the character, intensifying the sense of identification.</p>	<p>Who else do I dress up as? I I I actually I read a book about, a nonfiction I read two nonfiction novels actually that were particularly about, sports, and I dressed up as a as Missy Franklin, who's a swimmer. I dressed up as a surfer at one point too. And I think that's pretty much it from books. Yeah. Yeah. I think so.</p> <p>Did you like dressing up?</p> <p>Yeah. I mean, it was fun. It was fun when it would when when I was dressed up, you know?</p> <p>How did it make you feel?</p> <p>Kind of like I was this different person for the day, you know? Especially because when I was younger it was I was a different person for the day, you know. Every like when I was younger Halloween was very much like everyone acted like their character that they were dressed up as. I remember, like, a particular memory when I was dressed up as, I think I was Hermione. My friend was Elsa, and we were playing games where she had ice powers, and I had a wand. And it was everything's to us, you know. And because in that on that day in particular, we had the liberty to be who we could be whoever we wanted to be almost, you know, and, kind of reflect ourselves in a more tangible sense by our appearance to something that we wanted to.</p> <p>Yeah. That's cool.</p> <p>Yeah. That was fun. And I haven't done that honestly in the past couple years mostly because I've kind of gone and grown a little bit lazy about putting, like, a whole costume together because I used my costumes were always really thought out and very particular, you know, and I wanted them to be as accurate to the book description as I could.</p> <p>Why?</p> <p>Because I it's it felt almost sacrilegious to, like, make it not perfect. Because, if I was gonna be that character, I wanted to be as much exactly as I could be, you know. And I wanted people to recognise me as that character, you know. In particular, because I was kind of reading from from very, popular novels, so things like that.</p> <p>So it was important to be faithful to the character?</p> <p>I guess so. Yes. In that sense, I would say. In that in that particular moment of Halloween, it felt important to me to be faithful to that character in the sense of their appearance. And, like, oh, if I'm gonna be this character, I wanna make sure that I try to get, like, their outfit exactly right or something. Because if I wanna, like, be this character I wanna try to make it almost like, I really am. You know? Make it as tangible as possible that I almost am this person. You know?</p>	<p>Dressing up as characters enabled playful transformation and imaginative freedom</p> <p>Embodied identification — making fictional self visible through costume.</p> <p>Faithfulness to character important; striving for authenticity deepens identification</p> <p>Costumes blur line between self and character, creating a lived, physical form of fictional identification</p>

Experiential Statements	Transcript	Exploratory Noting
<p>Fictional identification operates as empathy — “walking in another’s shoes” — providing both imaginative and emotional perspective-taking.</p> <p>Characters’ exaggerated struggles act as magnified metaphors, making principles like self-forgiveness transferable to the adolescent’s own life.</p> <p>Fiction is understood as both reflective (mirroring identity) and reflexive (shaping choices and self-concept).</p>	<p>So, where like, were the lines blurry between Lily and the character when you dressed up?</p> <p>Blurring, I wouldn't say so much because I I have a pretty good grasp on my sense of self, but it kind of it was just fun to explore almost like another person's brain because, like, by adopting their appearance, you can almost explore another person's life. It's like walking in their shoes, you know. And I would literally do that because I would buy the shoes that they would wear or try to make them or something like that.</p> <p>Okay. Yeah. So it was, like, also very specific?</p> <p>Yeah. And it's like an empathetic, like, process as well, I would say. Kind of that that that that provides to you.</p> <p>And, do you think that some of your choices were directly influenced by the characters?</p> <p>Like my everyday choices?</p> <p>Whatever choices that come to your mind.</p> <p>Oh, choices. I mean, Yes. I I guess on some level, probably. Because because well, like, kind of like with the more mature novel series that I'm reading right now. With Aelin, which is another character, she was, she allowed herself the grace to forgive herself for her shortcomings. And so I kind of by realising that someone else could do that, I could also make the choice to forgive myself for certain things. If I felt that I was if I felt that there was a shortcoming of and and if if I felt that there was a short coming in my own self, I could forgive myself for it because another character did as well. Because their shortcomings were more enhanced, like, and they were deep and they were they were it's almost because, like, I kind of feel sometimes that novels are, like, in a very, very exaggerated hyperbole version of reality almost. So that every little thing that every little change that you go through is, like, 20 times magnified in a book. So that and then and they they came they kinda make it into this tangible thing of, like, in the book, it's, like, instead of forgiving yourself for, for example, if you didn't complete your work on time, in the book, it's, like, forgiving yourself because your friend died, which is like really really really dramatic, but it's more tangible almost in a sense.</p> <p>You can apply the principle?</p> <p>You can apply the principle and it's easier to realise the principle when it's a more dramatic kind of moment, you know. So that's kind of why I think that sometimes novels can be like a big giant magnifying glass that has like added spice and drama into it. And well, I mean, in English class, we were observing how that, art can both, like, reflect and be reflexive. Like, it can reflect, like, the actual world and, be reflexive in the sense that it can create change as well. So characters, I think, can reflect your own sense of self, but they can also be reflexive and kind of affect back your sense of self.</p>	<p>Costuming framed as an empathic exercise; identification as perspective-taking.</p> <p>Fiction inspires real-life choices; characters’ coping strategies internalized.</p> <p>Fiction experienced as dramatized reality; exaggeration makes abstract principles tangible.</p> <p>Explicit recognition of fiction’s dual function: mirroring self and shaping identity.</p>

Experiential Statements	Transcript	Exploratory Noting
<p>Fictional and nonfictional figures act as mirrors for life transitions, validating the adolescent's own decisions and changes.</p> <p>Characters provide enduring models — shaping passions (books), supporting authenticity (rejecting perfection), and guiding relational attitudes (independence with vulnerability).</p> <p>Fiction is explicitly acknowledged as a source of role models, actively informing the adolescent's personality and growth.</p>	<p>Like, by choices that you make. Or sometimes you might, I think when I made the choice to... what's a big choice that I've made? Like, when I made the choice to leave swimming and just do triathlon in particular. That was, like, a big moment for me, because a big part of myself was being a swimmer, but I felt that if I wanted to be good enough triathlete that I had to leave swimming. So by by letting myself leave swimming. I guess I would say that I reflect, like okay. The choice of leaving swimming kind of related back to how, well, particularly the Missy Franklin novel that I read. She left swimming as well as, like, a Olympic athlete, you know. She retired really early because it was best for her. And while I can't relate to the Olympic level. I can almost relate to the fact that she had to leave something that she loved because it was better for herself. And so and that was, like, a nonfiction novel, and it was an actual autobiography. So it was it was interesting. So there was that. But then also, like, that was, like, Aileen left one of her lives behind because she needed to explore a different life. You know? And so that was kinda like that for me. I left swimming, which was one of, like, one of the facets of my life so that I could explore something else.</p> <p>And do you think that you incorporated any of the characteristics of Hermione and Aileen and and these characters in your own personality?</p> <p>Yeah. Like, because I related so deeply to <b>Hermione</b>, I was really I really was that bookworm when I was little. When I was well, not when I was little. When I was younger, I guess. So, like, while I felt like I could already see myself in her, more of her kind of affected me, in that specific phase, and it really fostered that love of books for me, you know. That particular facet of her personality really fostered that love of books in myself, which I still pursue to this day. And other characters like like <b>Gabi</b>, allowing myself to, like, change and evolve and reject some parts of my identity or, like, allowing myself to be not perfect because, I mean, it's in the title, you know. I'm not your perfect Mexican daughter, but, kind of affected how I could be like myself, you know. And then also <b>Annabeth</b>, like, in part like, I always kind of stated it, the independence with asking for help. I can do that too. Like, that affects how I am as well. I guess, because of what how independent she was, I kinda became more independent and then also though, as she realized that she could ask for help, I realized I could ask for help, you know, almost in that kind of sense.</p> <p>Like a model?</p> <p>Like a what?</p> <p>A model?</p> <p>Yeah. I guess. Yeah. Kind of like a model. I would say so. Yeah.</p> <p>Uh-huh. Okay. I think that's it.</p> <p>Cool.</p>	<p>Nonfictional and fictional figures serve as parallels for difficult life transitions; literature provides frameworks for self-understanding.</p> <p>Identification as metaphor; fictional journeys validate personal transformations.</p> <p>Fiction shapes enduring personal interests and practices. Fiction normalises imperfection; supports authenticity and identity negotiation.</p> <p>Characters function as behavioural models, shaping attitudes toward independence and vulnerability.</p> <p>Explicit recognition of characters as role models influencing identity development.</p>

## Annex H - Dann's Interview

Experiential Statements	Transcript	Exploratory Noting
<p>Games create active, revisitable worlds for identity exploration.</p> <p>TV shows provide passive immersion, though chosen stories echo adolescent struggles.</p>	<p>Okay, yeah, this is recording. Sometimes I'm always worried it's not recording. Okay, so, let's start with the first question. Can you tell me about the types of entertainment that you enjoy the most? Yeah. Whether that's like movies, TV shows?</p> <p>For me, I really like playing video games and watching TV shows. Movies not so much, although I do watch them sometimes. I don't really, you know, I get excited for a movie here and there, but I don't really watch them always. But yeah, mainly video games, I think.</p> <p>Why? Why do you prefer?</p> <p>Oh, just because it's, I can keep going back to them. It's usually there's something, I'm going to find something new to do with it. Or there's some different thing I didn't think about when playing it. And it's just more open, I think. And there's some games, there's different things you can do that, you know, they really contrast each other. And then you can keep going back and keep playing and keep trying something different, which I quite like. And there's also modern communities for games like Minecraft. And I think it's cool to explore that. It's always something new.</p> <p>So, you keep going back to them?</p> <p>Yeah, there's sometimes, some games just like, I keep going back to some. And there's always like a new game I want to play. But normally I go back to select two that I really enjoy. And it's always like something different that I can do. But there's games like that you need to really work a lot. I think at the end of like an hour or something, you get something cool out of it. So that's also fun to have.</p> <p>And the TV shows?</p> <p>TV shows. I watch one here and there. Sometimes I watch anime as well. Like older ones. There's this boxing one that I saw. There's also the Vinland Saga and Attack on Titan that I watched. I like those as well.</p> <p>They're long.</p> <p>Yeah, they're quite long. But I do prefer shorter ones because, you know, sometimes I start one. Like Attack on Titan, I started it a while ago. I still haven't finished it though. Because when they kept releasing the new season or the last season, part 3 and part 4, I never really watched them. Vinland Saga, I saw season 1. And then season 2 dropped. I never really started it actually. So it's always like I watch it and then after a while I just stop watching it. And then a few months later I go back to watching it.</p> <p>And the same thing that attracts you to video games attracts you to TV shows?</p> <p>No. When I watch a TV show, normally I just want to not do much and just enjoy watching something. It's something that if I want to do absolutely nothing but still have something to do, I guess, I watch a TV show.</p>	<p>Stronger pull toward interactive media for immersion.</p> <p>Replayability fuels sustained engagement and self-exploration</p> <p>Fictional spaces expanded through social/community ties</p> <p>Attraction to identity-rich, conflict-driven narratives</p> <p>Passive, comfort-driven immersion, less exploratory</p>

Experiential Statements	Transcript	Exploratory Noting
<p>Fictional identification is deeply entwined with lived experiences: constant travelling makes adventure stories feel personally resonant.</p> <p>Heroes like Batman/ Spider-Man inspire a protective orientation toward friends, showing identification as moral modelling.</p> <p>Characters with singular, exaggerated traits (Hulk, Wolverine) appeal for their clarity and simplicity, offering stable points of identification.</p>	<p>Okay, cool. And whether it's watching a TV show or whether that's playing a game, what type of stories do you gravitate towards?</p> <p>I'd say more the action stories. I'd say action-adventuring would be my main one.</p> <p>Why do you think that you're attracted to those types of stories?</p> <p>I think because I quite like adventuring. I spend most of my life outside of where I'm originally from. And I'm always travelling to new places, I think.</p> <p>Where are you from?</p> <p>I'm originally from the Netherlands. But I moved away when I was four and I moved to Indonesia, Bali. I lived there for two years. And then in those two years I travelled a lot around that part, Southeast Asia. And then I came here to Portugal. And I travelled a lot here in the last few years especially. I mean, I've been to Greece, I've been to Spain quite a bit, Ireland, Italy. And just travelling and going to new places is quite fun. So I like to do that as well. When I play video games, I like to explore, try and go everywhere. And in TV shows, if they go on adventures, I like just to watch them.</p> <p>Cool. It's really cool. It's a lot of places. Yeah. Cool. And what type of characters are you drawn from? Do you think if you pull from video games and the TV shows, what characters do you relate to?</p> <p>Relate to? I think it would be funny to say Batman, but I can't really say that, I think.</p> <p>Why would it be funny?</p> <p>It's just like a meme, I think. Because he's always there. He's always doing something to protect others. I quite like that. I guess you could say that it inspires me as well. And I think when I think about my friends, I quite like them. If something would happen to them, it's only natural to try and help them. And I think that those characters, Batman and Spider-Man, they tend to do that quite a bit. But then other characters I quite like are just brute forces like Wolverine, Hulk, The Thing as well. I just also like it when these characters just have one thing about them, and then it carries on through their whole story, I guess.</p> <p>Can you explain that a bit more? What's that thing?</p> <p>What I like in a character is if they have a story or a show. I enjoy characters based on the surface level. Usually when I get to know a different character. I just like it when I see them for one thing that they have. And then if I get to see that quite a lot, then I'm quite attracted to the character, I guess. I quite enjoy watching them maybe. Like the Hulk, right? On the surface level, he's just like a big green guy and he just attacks a bunch of different things. I quite like that. So being a brute force. Yeah, I quite like that in a character.</p>	<p>Drawn to narratives of exploration and conflict; mirrors adolescent search for excitement and growth.</p> <p>Personal biography of displacement and travel resonates with fictional themes of adventure and exploration.</p> <p>Actively re-creates his own mobility in fictional spaces; exploration becomes both personal and virtual.</p> <p>Identification with protective, altruistic heroes; reflects adolescent moral development and desire to care for friends.</p> <p>Parallel attraction to raw strength and simplicity; characters embody singular traits that are compelling and easy to latch onto.</p> <p>Emphasis on consistency and recognizable traits; adolescents may find stability and clarity in characters defined by one strong attribute.</p>

Experiential Statements	Transcript	Exploratory Noting
<p>Identification is guided by admiration for protective strength and loyalty, not spotlight-seeking — heroes mirror his relational values.</p> <p>Fictional powers (Spider-Man, sword fighters) embody desired freedoms and abilities, linked to both imagination and real-life interests (martial arts).</p> <p>Narrative-driven games foster immersion, even if identification with characters is partial or situational rather than biographical.</p>	<p>You were talking about some aspect of protection.</p> <p>I like a character who's big and strong like that, but also who can protect others, I guess. They don't always have to be the centre of the attention, but they're always there. They're always supporting, I guess, a group maybe. Or they support a group. They don't need to be a big centre of attention. They don't need to be the best or the strongest person there. But they don't have to be the strongest, but they're still strong. And they still have the ability to protect others. That's what I quite like.</p> <p>So Batman, Spider-Man, and then you said that you liked some of the brutality of Wolverine, the Hulk, and the Thing. Yeah. Right? Yeah. Okay. These are cool superheroes. And do you think that... Well, it's obviously in a fantastical way, but do you think that any of these characters ever did things that you wished you could do?</p> <p>Yeah. Honestly, sometimes I wish I could swing around like Spider-Man. I think that would be cool. Or...</p> <p>Why would that be cool?</p> <p>I don't know. If you think about it, we spend most of our time on the ground. And if you can fly a plane and stuff, you can go fast in cars. But if you're Spider-Man, you don't really need any of that. You can just go on high rides. Because it's in New York, you can swing around everywhere. And I think that would be cool to just do. Because it's not something you can think about every day, right? You can't just think, oh yeah, I need to hurry up. I need to go to this place. And think, oh yeah, let me just swing there through all the buildings. And I think that's cool.</p> <p>And any other characters that did things that you wished you could do?</p> <p>I think... In characters, sword fighters. I think that's pretty cool. Because I like martial arts as well quite a bit. And I think that the way that they... At least in some games that they use swords. I think that's pretty cool. For example, not over the top, but more realistic ones. Like in The Legend of Zelda. Breath of the Wild specifically. When they use a sword or a spear. I quite like the way that looks. And I think it would be cool to also do that in real life.</p> <p>What type of games do you play? What games do you like?</p> <p>Mainly RPG games. Games that follow a storyline. Like Red Dead Redemption, Breath of the Wild. Also some Pokemon games. But I also play Euro shooting games. If I play with my friends online, then I play that.</p> <p>And is there any character in the video games that you relate to?</p> <p>Relate? Probably not, actually. I don't think so. In terms of background and character, probably not.</p> <p>But do you identify with any of the aspects of their life?</p>	<p>Values quiet strength and group support; fictional identification reflects his own ideals of loyalty and relational responsibility.</p> <p>Explicit fantasy of inhabiting a character's powers; playful but meaningful wish to transcend ordinary limits</p> <p>Attraction to freedom of movement and speed; fictional identification tied to liberation from everyday constraints.</p> <p>Blending of personal interest (martial arts) with fictional admiration; identification with realistic combat heroes (Zelda).</p> <p>Drawn to narrative depth in games; story-driven experiences offer richer ground for fictional immersion.</p> <p>Distinction: does not see himself in characters' histories, but may still connect through aspects or actions.</p>

Experiential Statements	Transcript	Exploratory Noting
<p>Identification here works through parallels between Spider-Man's "double life" and the participant's own dual demands (school vs. competitive sailing).</p> <p>Games foster identification by making consequences personal, reinforcing moral and emotional involvement. Fiction provides a space to imagine experiences not lived directly, but still emotionally resonant.</p>	<p>I don't think so. I can't really think of an example. Other than in terms of physical builds, probably not. Just their storylines and what they try to achieve. I don't think I really relate to that. But I still like to imagine what it's like for them. And what it's like to have those experiences happen to me. And I think that's what makes me play those games as well. Seeing what happens in different situations. Especially in Red Dead Redemption. The different choices you make, it also affects the outcome of the game. And that's something that pulls me more towards the game. The different decisions. If you make good ones, better things will happen, of course. And seeing that makes me quite enjoy it. And that gives me a sense of relation to the character. Because it's actually like, oh yeah, I did well here. Now I get this as a reward. Whereas if I did something bad, it's like, oh no, I messed this up. And then the character suffers from it. And it's like, well, I kind of messed that up. I should probably try to fix that in the future.</p> <p>So it's about being involved? And having consequences? Rewards?</p> <p>Yeah. I think that having consequences helps me relate more to the character.</p> <p>And do you think that any of the characters that you mentioned have gone through personal struggles that you can relate to?</p> <p>I guess so, yeah. But only, for example, Spider-Man, most of the fictions, he's a high school character. And he struggles, I guess, in some cases with bullying. I don't think I struggle with that as much. But combining his life as a hero and his regular life, I think sometimes I have issues with combining that as well. Because I do a lot of activities outside of school. Like I sail competitively. So I miss quite a lot of school, especially the last few weeks. Also, with the basketball tournament that just happened this weekend, I tend to miss a lot of school for these activities. Some of my teachers aren't happy with it, some are fine. But it's a struggle to keep the balance of the grades and of the written work and all the long assignments. I usually struggle with those. And then balancing that is something I think I can relate to, I guess, with Spider-Man. Just the balancing of one life and another life. At the same time.</p> <p>Is it difficult for you then? So it's like two lives?</p> <p>I think so. But it's just two lives because of how different they are. One is you do it every day, it's always consistent. The work just varies a little bit. But with the sports, it's two very different sports. And it's always something different that I work with when I sail, for example. Conditions are never really the same. And the contrast of partaking in a sport and working in school is quite different. Because of the sense of competition, I guess. It's very competitive to sail. A lot of people... It's very risky because you can damage a lot of your body in a boat. And in school, it's more self-centred. Centred about what I think I can do. Instead of what I think others can do and how that might affect me.</p>	<p>Identification through imaginative projection rather than direct similarity.</p> <p>Agency in games strengthens connection; consequences personalize the fictional experience.</p> <p>Clear self-fiction parallel: balancing dual demands of school vs. extracurriculars.</p> <p>Real-life tension resonates with Spider-Man's "double life." This is a particularly strong example of fictional identification grounded in personal biography.</p> <p>Reflection on dual identities; fictional struggle illuminates lived experience.</p>

Experiential Statements	Transcript	Exploratory Noting
<p>Identification with Spider-Man is nuanced: he relates not just to the “double life” but also to Peter Parker’s social selectivity and inward focus.</p> <p>Sailing allows him to project a “heroic self,” contrasting with his school life, which mirrors Peter Parker’s ordinary, more solitary existence.</p> <p>Multiple iterations of Spider-Man provide flexible entry points for identification, allowing him to select versions that align with his personal experience.</p>	<p>What do you think you can do? Can you explain that?</p> <p>Yeah, so... In school, for example, in most of my classes, I like to work alone. Because it helps me focus about me better. But when I'm competing, I think about what others might be doing. And how that should affect me. And that's, I think, two different things again about me. I think differently in two different aspects. Or two different... What's it called? Locations, I guess. Two different zones of life, I guess.</p> <p>And you're talking about the contrast between that and, I guess, Peter Parker's...</p> <p>Yeah, his high school life and then what he has to do as Spider-Man. In his high school, he's very smart. So he doesn't struggle much with his grades. But his personal life and his connections with people. That's something he struggles with more. And then as Spider-Man, it's like he... It's like two completely different things. Because as Spider-Man, he's always socially active. He always talks with his villains. But I see more that as Peter Parker, he struggles with that more. At least I get that idea.</p> <p>And what part of your life is the school... Or the hero part?</p> <p>I'd say the sailing is more like the hero part. And then the school is like the school.</p> <p>Why?</p> <p>Because I think I'm more self-centred. At least when working, I'm more self-centred. I try to think only about what I'm doing. And I think that relates to Spider-Man's... or Peter Parker's school. From what I get from the character, at least, he's more individual. He struggles a bit socially, I guess. I mean, not all iterations of Spider-Man. But from the ones that I've seen, he struggles with that. And that's why I think I relate to more.</p> <p>Yeah, I mean, it looks like you've... You said different iterations. Have you seen a lot of different iterations?</p> <p>Yeah, I mean, there's a difference between the live-action and the animated ones. In some animated ones, he's actually very social. He has a lot of personal connections with different people. But then if you take a look at Andrew Garfield, I think it was only Aunt May, really, and Gwen. But other than that, he didn't have any connections, really. Tobey Maguire in Spider-Man. Again, I think very few. There was Osborn, his aunt, I think his landlord as well. But then if you look at Tom Holland's Spider-Man, there's three specific or four specific connections with Tony Stark. Again, his aunt, and then Ned, and MJ, and then everywhere else.</p> <p>He's more sociable?</p> <p>Less. He's only sociable with a select group of people.</p> <p>With a select group of people...</p> <p>And then everyone else is more... I guess he struggles more.</p>	<p>Sees himself inhabiting different modes of selfhood; links well with theme of dual identities.</p> <p>Directly maps his own split to Spider-Man's two lives, reinforcing identification.</p> <p>Sailing framed as heroic self; everyday school life as mundane self.</p> <p>Identifies with Peter's social struggles, not necessarily with Spider-Man's heroics. Emphasis on individual</p> <p>Engages critically with variations; picks out aspects that resonate with his own social selectivity</p> <p>Reflects participant's own experience of intimacy with a few vs. distance from many.</p>

Experiential Statements	Transcript	Exploratory Noting
<p>Identification operates within fictional frames: morality and decisions shift depending on the role and cultural code (samurai vs outlaw).</p> <p>The participant consciously adopts the intended role of the character, demonstrating reflexive engagement with fictional morality.</p> <p>While fiction is “disconnected” from real life, identification still functions powerfully in shaping how he plays and experiences stories.</p>	<p>And do you think that in any of the characters that you mentioned, do you think that their stories made you think about your own past or your own future?</p> <p>No, I don't think so, actually. Because I guess from the stories I've seen, or I've read, or I've played, it always seems so disconnected from my reality, I guess, that I didn't really see a way how that would connect to what I was doing. Yeah. I think so, yeah.</p> <p>And do you think that were there any choices that were directly influenced by characters?</p> <p>Sorry, could you explain the question a bit more?</p> <p>I don't want to put you down a path, but let's think about it like this. Imagine that you saw maybe one of your struggles, or maybe something in your life, reflected in one of the stories, and maybe there was some choice attached to it, or the character had some choice attached to it. Do you think that could have made you reflect about a particular choice of yours?</p> <p>I think that most of the decisions I make in-game are solely tied to the game, and what I experienced, for example, in the game. There's a game that I've played quite a bit as well, Ghost of Tsushima. There I've made completely different decisions to what I would make in Red Dead Redemption. Because also the setting is completely different. One is in Japan, the other is in the Midwest, in the U.S., I guess. And in Japan, as a samurai, it's more honour-based, and I make decisions that would resemble that of a samurai. Whereas in Red Dead Redemption, it's an outlaw, I just rob a bunch of people all the time. I make decisions based off, in that situation, what I think might be best, even though maybe it's not always as fair to a certain group of people that aren't there at that specific time. There isn't also that big of a consequence to killing people in Red Dead Redemption compared to Ghost of Tsushima. Because the characters in Ghost of Tsushima, it's actually one of the storylines that if you assassinate someone, that actually changed the way, I think, or one of the outcomes of the game. Because as a samurai, you're not supposed to just stab someone in the back, you always face them head-on. And that's something I tend to not do when I play that game. But as in Red Dead Redemption, I try and sneak my way through a large group, take them out one by one, instead of just going and gods blazing.</p> <p>Okay, so you really take the role of the character, and you contextualise the character?</p> <p>Yeah. I try not to play the same way in every game. I try not to be like... I try to play the game as I guess it's intended to play.</p> <p>You're consciously aware of that?</p> <p>Yes.</p> <p>Why do you think so? Why do you think that you gravitate towards following, I guess, the character's morality?</p>	<p>Acknowledges distance from fictional worlds; suggests identification is situational rather than life-guiding.</p> <p>Separates fictional decisions from real-life choices, but within-game morality still matters.</p> <p>Immerses into character role and moral code; strong situational identification.</p> <p>Identification is flexible, adapting to fictional setting; morality shifts with role.</p> <p>Conscious role-taking, aligning behavior with narrative logic; reflects reflexivity in identification.</p>

Experiential Statements	Transcript	Exploratory Noting
<p>Identification is intensified when moral decisions resonate with perceived cultural codes, leading him to act in-character.</p> <p>Variety of combat stances and tactics fosters deeper identification by simulating authentic skill and adaptability.</p>	<p>I guess it makes me more enjoyment, more entertainment as well. I get to be part of the story. In Ghost of Tsushima, it's really just like there's a final battle between you and what was your father figure. And then in the end, you have an option to either kill him or spare him. And I thought, you know, as a samurai, there's an honour in... Because he was a caretaker for him, because his real dad died, and this was like his uncle, I guess. He took care of him, he trained him, and I thought it would be disrespectful to just off him at the end of the game. Even though it wasn't ordered by, I guess, the emperor for him to have him kill me, I just felt it would be disrespectful to then end up killing him. So in the end, I left the option to spare him, because I felt that would be right for a samurai to do.</p> <p>Do you think it's in any way related to immersion?</p> <p>Yeah, I think so. I think that as I was playing that game, I felt really immersed in also as in the combat and the storyline.</p> <p>What about the combat?</p> <p>Well, it was mainly sword fighting, right? But it was also, you could use a bow and arrow. You also had different tools that you could use, which I actually quite liked, like a sticky bomb or a couple of throwing knives. And I thought that was pretty cool. And it really felt, as I was fighting, it felt like I was actually like a samurai, because there was also different, I guess, stances you could use, which in martial arts is also different techniques, I think. Also among, in a certain group, like in Muay Thai, there's also different techniques and approaches to situations, which was also present in the game. And I quite like that. I quite like that there's different options you can choose and that for different characters, there's different approaches you can take to fight them. And that's why I quite like that immersion more.</p> <p>What about the, like, why do you like the options or why do you think that's relevant?</p> <p>I think it's relevant because there's, for example, in Ghost of Tsushima, you take on the Mongolian army, and it's a really wide range of, I think there was a wide range of units in that army itself. There was a common foot soldier, but in the foot soldier, you can have spearmen, like sword, I guess, people who just wield a sword and a shield, or archers. And then you had to take different approaches or different stances to fight those individuals, like a sword fighter. It's a simple, there was a stance called a stone stance, but that was against a guy who just had a sword. And if he had a shield, you would have to take a water stance, because there was more attacks that caused more pressure on the enemy. And then I guess a spear fighter, you would take it to something called a wind stance, where you would be much more agile, because the spear had a long range and to get in close, you had to move quicker to approach the guy who was wielding the spear. And that's what I quite liked about, in terms of immersion, in terms of relating more to the character, feeling more like a character.</p>	<p>Meaningful moral choice; identification heightened through role-consistent decision-making.</p> <p>Aligns with samurai honor code; demonstrates moral alignment with character's cultural context.</p> <p>Clear example of immersion reinforcing fictional identification.</p> <p>Appreciation of tactical variation enhances identification; options deepen sense of "being the character."</p>

Experiential Statements	Transcript	Exploratory Noting
<p>Fictional identification operates through admiration of persistence and dedication, with heroes modelling work ethic.</p> <p>While he often denies direct life-story parallels, identification emerges in values: persistence against difficulty becomes internalised as personal motivation.</p> <p>Fiction provides not only escape but also <i>inspirational templates</i>, especially when aligned with personal struggles.</p>	<p>And from all the characters that you mentioned, you mentioned a lot of characters, and do you think that there's threads that connect them, things that you relate to, like common aspects between all of them?</p> <p>Well, there's always, especially in the video games, but there's always one specific goal in mind. So there's a lot of routes you can take, maybe, there's a lot of side quests you can do. But in the end, there's always just the end goal of defeating the big bad guy. In Ghost of Tsushima, it was the leader of the Mongolian military. In Red Dead Redemption, for a while, it was the law or the Pinkertons or a different rival gang. In The Legend of Zelda, it's Ganondorf. There's always an end goal of defeating a natural evil, I guess.</p> <p>Do you think that, in any way, takes shape in your own life?</p> <p>No, I don't think so. I really don't think so, no. I guess I play these games just to take a break, also to take a break, but I don't think that most of these characters, I don't really relate to them like that.</p> <p>And do you think that you've incorporated any of the characteristics of the characters in your own personality?</p> <p>I think I might have, yeah. Mainly, it would be in terms of work ethic. I really, I respect work ethic a lot. Also, amongst friends, I like it when they put in more work than the normal. Like, probably a hard, for example, would be Batman. He's really well known for his dedication, for his work ethic. And I just like that. And I think that's something I probably would have taken from a character like him, yeah.</p> <p>Can you explain that a bit more?</p> <p>Yeah, so, a long time, I was lazy. I think I still am lazy. And then, I really, I quite suffered for it in terms of school grades, but also in terms of healthiness. I really wasn't fit for a while. But this was when I was a bit younger. Then I started on YouTube. I saw a guy who would cover comics. And somehow, I would always end up with comics that explain this character has a lot of determination, he works a lot. And I guess that kind of grew on me. A lot of the TV shows I've seen also involve the character just keep going, keep head down, moving forward. Like the boxing anime Hajime no Ippo. The character starts off really scrawny, skinny, he's bullied a lot. But he just kept his head down and kept working. And eventually, he became a rookie champion. That's how far I got for now. I still haven't finished it as well. But I think it's cool to see that if you put in the work, put in the hours, you get a reward from that.</p> <p>And has your work ethic improved?</p>	<p>Identifies a structural thread across stories; recognition of clear purpose, though he denies direct personal link.</p> <p>Resists drawing life parallels; maintains boundary between fiction and reality.</p> <p>Acknowledges indirect incorporation of character traits into self.</p> <p>Clear role-model function; fictional identification shaping personal values.</p> <p>Personal life history makes work ethic especially relevant; identification becomes corrective.</p> <p>Finds inspiration in perseverance stories; fiction provides motivational blueprint for self-improvement.</p>

Experiential Statements	Transcript	Exploratory Noting
<p>Fictional identification here becomes fully practical: the work ethic of character directly informs his persistence in sailing.</p> <p>Emotional resonance with characters' struggles and victories is mapped onto his own competitive experiences, reinforcing motivation.</p> <p>Fictional perseverance is internalised as a personal ethic, driving real-world growth in resilience and dedication.</p>	<p>I think so, yeah. I think a few years ago, there's some situations where I definitely would have just quit also in sailing. There's sometimes when the wind is just really strong, the waves are really big. And it definitely would have been hard for me to just keep going. But now, when I get to that situation, I'm actually enjoying it a lot more. And I think that, yeah, if I go through this, it's going to feel really good. And I just dedicate myself to maybe a specific day where it's like the conditions I just said. And just keep trying to go through that. And I think it's me trying to prove myself that I can do something if I just put my mind to it.</p> <p>Do you think that the characters will affected your own work ethic in a practical way.</p> <p>What would you mean. What would you mean like practical? Like as in schoolwork or?</p> <p>I guess if a character has or a character's work ethic has made you think about your own work ethic in a real life scenario.</p> <p>Oh yeah, yeah. That I think definitely. Again, the Hajime no Ippo, it's the boxing one, that definitely made an impact. I definitely became or started working more because of it. And again, in the sailing scenario, that improved my work ethic more. Not really yet as much for school as I should work. I still try and dedicate myself to it, but I still slack off a little bit. But that is getting better. And after seeing the show, it was like, yeah, I think that if I could start dedicating myself a lot more, putting in the hours, I think it could be. I could feel what the character felt in the TV show. And I think that would be really nice.</p> <p>What are some of the things that he felt?</p> <p>Well, first he felt, you know, all the pain and hardships of putting in the hours. But then he felt, I guess, overjoyed when he finally became rookie champion. And I have had a few experiences where I was, I guess, podium on a sailing competition where I almost won.</p> <p>You were on a podium?</p> <p>Yeah. And I really, I still remember that feeling. And then when I'm working or when I'm training, I think back to what that felt like. And I try and think, OK, in this championship, maybe it's possible to get back to that point. And that's where I dedicate myself again. And I think to the end goal and what that might feel like. And then it also motivates me to keep working hard.</p> <p>Perseverance.</p> <p>Yeah.</p> <p>OK. OK. I think that we're done. Yep. OK.</p>	<p>Growth in resilience; ties perseverance in sport to fictional inspiration.</p> <p>Direct link: fictional identification influencing real-life behavior.</p> <p>Fictional influence as an ideal: character motivates future aspirations</p> <p>Empathetic mirroring of character's emotional arc; internalizes struggle-reward dynamic.</p> <p>Connects fictional perseverance with lived achievement; cyclical motivation loop between fiction and real life.</p> <p>Explicitly adopts perseverance as a personal ethic, shaped by fictional narrative.</p>

## Annex I - Omar's Interview

Experiential Statements	Transcript	Exploratory Noting
<p>Fictional identification appears linked to immersion in alternative worlds (movies, video games)</p> <p>Adolescence is marked by a search for dynamic, surprising narratives (twists, constant change), suggesting identification thrives in stories that break predictability.</p> <p>The participant connects with fictional universes that feel expansive and evolving</p>	<p>Okay, fantastic, incredible. Okay, so, hi. Can you tell me a bit about the types of entertainment you enjoy the most, whether that's like movies, TV shows, comic books?</p> <p>My favourite has to be movies and video games, primarily. I've gotten into shows a bit, but generally it's still movies and video games. Occasionally comics, but much less.</p> <p>What's appealing about movies and video games? What do you think you get out of it? What do you like it?</p> <p>Video games is just something I've always had, so it's kind of... Because it's something I enjoy, it's something skill required, so, and often the stories are also relatable, I enjoy. Movies are just... It's so immersing, you feel like you're in the world, it's super cool. And then on top of that, it's not like a show where you get left with cliffhangers all the time, you get a concluding story.</p> <p>Okay. And you were speaking a bit about comics too, do you like comics?</p> <p>I used to read German comics a lot.</p> <p>German comics? Okay.</p> <p>And that was the, like, I don't know what they're called in English, but it's like the Donald Duck comics. Donald Duck comics, yeah. Different, like, universes, and sometimes those are just normal stories, so yeah. Those were interesting for me.</p> <p>And, like, when either looking at a movie, or looking at a video game, or either looking at comics, are there, like, characteristics of the stories that you look for?</p> <p>I mean, generally I like a story that has twists, but not ones that are predictable. I like when a story, you don't really know where it's going, and then when you do get to it, it's like, wow, that's crazy. That's a big change. So, if it's like a linear, normal story, it's also fine, but it's just, I feel like there's less, it has me less hooked, it's less entertaining. If it's a story that's constantly changing, there's new aspects, there's many different characters, it's far more interesting for me.</p> <p>And, like, what kind of stories pop out to mind when you think of that?</p> <p>Stories? Well, I guess the, well, I guess I just watched Invincible, and that's like, every episode is so different from the others.</p> <p>Can you explain to me a bit about Invincible?</p> <p>Invincible is kind of a more realistic Justice League, I guess. And, it's every episode, like, it's not like there's just one bad guy throughout the whole show. Every episode, he's fighting, kind of, it's a new problem, it's a new guy. Sometimes, of course, they come back from other episodes, which is also fun, but it's kind of every episode has a new approach, kind of a new, basic, completely new fight and completely new story.</p>	<p>Establishes primary entertainment forms; early hierarchy of media preferences.</p> <p>Emphasis on immersion and presence, hints at experiential identification.</p> <p>Recalls childhood engagement with alternative fictional universes.</p> <p>Preference for unpredictability and surprise; narrative engagement as central.</p> <p>Appeal of variety and realism within the superhero genre.</p>

Experiential Statements	Transcript	Exploratory Noting
<p>Fictional identification is strengthened by emotional resonance with character struggles and mirroring of adolescent responsibilities</p> <p>Characters function as lenses for making sense of pressures in adolescence, translating personal challenges into narrative form</p>	<p>Does it have the twisting aspect you were talking about before?</p> <p>Yes, yeah. So, of course, there's a few major twists. Of course, unfortunately, through the internet, I already knew some of them.</p> <p>You got spoiled?</p> <p>Yeah. It's never fun. But it's still the way it happens. Like, for example, Star Wars is something I've watched a bajillion times, and I still, the episode three, when Darth Vader, that still shocks me every time. So it's the way the plot twists happen, even if I already know them, they're just really good.</p> <p>Can you explain that a little more of the Star Wars?</p> <p>Star Wars, so I've always liked Star Wars. It's always been, like, my favourite series of films and just series in general. And I feel like it's just so emotional to see such a loved character, such a character that looks good. Then suddenly, you know, he's pressured into this dark side, and then he turns evil. And it's just, it's a character that you really wouldn't want to. He's, like, he's powerful. He's supposed to bring balance, and then he turns evil. It's just, if you understand why he turns evil, it feels like it was meant to happen. But it's still, it's very shocking every time.</p> <p>Why do you think he turns evil?</p> <p>Well, it's because, of course, the pressures of his life. He was a slave. His mother was killed. He saw many people around him die. He saw visions of his wife dying. It's just, that's very hard for him. But then again, he's also the chosen one, which means he was kind of destined to turn bad. And then, I guess, things just happen. And then, eventually, he meets his destiny through that. And yeah.</p> <p>And from the things that you mentioned, whether that's video games or movies, do you think there is, like, any particular character that jumps out that you identify with?</p> <p>I mean, it's always the, it's always kind of the, like a Spider-Man has always been, like a Peter Parker, because of the whole idea of having to live a life that's so, so much responsibility, so much to do. And then, you kind of, like, have to fight the pressure of it. The life of, for example, for him, it's being Spider-Man, having a relationship with his aunt, having his friends, having to do well in school, having to fight crime, every day. It's just, it's relatable for most young people, I think, I would say, because you have the pressures of school, you have the pressures of your own life, you have the pressures of, if you do sports, you have sports. You have then the pressures of, you know, you're growing up, you have to go to university soon, you have to become an adult. So, it's that, it's just those many pressures in life that are generally, often, very relatable characters.</p>	<p>Repeated viewing sustains emotional impact; immersion remains strong</p> <p>Highlights emotional power of character transformation</p> <p>Direct identification, character seen as relatable to own adolescent pressures</p>

Experiential Statements	Transcript	Exploratory Noting
<p>Identification is strongest when characters' struggles with expectations and emotional overwhelm mirror adolescent realities</p> <p>Realism in fiction (injury, recovery, consequences) deepens identification, as it portrays vulnerability rather than invincible perfection</p>	<p>Are you thinking about a particular Spider-Man?</p> <p>Uh, I guess the, I mean, the Peter Parker one shows it well, where it shows the...</p> <p>The Peter Parker show?</p> <p>Sorry, the Tom Holland one.</p> <p>Oh, the Tom Holland one.</p> <p>The Tom Holland one is shown well. The, I don't remember which one the animated series was. I think it's, no, it's not the Incredible Spider-Man, I can't remember. The animated show shows it well. And, of course, the Andrew Garfield one, I think, was a very good one. Because then, actually, it really does show how emotional you can get with the pressures of life. Whereas the other ones kind of just say like, oh yeah, these pressures are happening, but I'm Spider-Man, I have to go through it. But the Andrew Garfield one really shows how it breaks and how it's, and then how he has to fight through that.</p> <p>Can you explain a bit more about the pressures?</p> <p>The pressures, like I said, it's just having all those things in life. You feel like you have to meet those expectations. You have to meet not only your expectations, but of other people. And then, of course, that gets heavy. That's a heavy life. So, like I said, the Andrew Garfield one, especially, is one of the more emotional ones, where it really shows how those pressures can get to someone, but how he has to then fight through that emotion to try to stay, well, try to keep his composure.</p> <p>Yeah, like he's being pulled from all sides?</p> <p>Yeah, or even pushed from all sides, just in general. He's everywhere, but he has to also focus on himself. But he has to be everywhere.</p> <p>And other than Peter Parker, is there someone else that you think about?</p> <p>I mean, like I just watched Invincible. It's a very similar story. It's a superhero who has to try to keep his identity secret, but then he also has to fight crime every day. But with him, it's a bit more extreme. Like I said, it's more realistic. So, they actually do get beat up, and then he gets super injured, and then he can't do certain things. So, it's different to other movies where they just recover instantly. With Invincible, it's far more realistic, where it actually has to show him recovering.</p> <p>There's consequences?</p>	<p>Highlights preference for portrayals that emphasize emotional struggle.</p> <p>Maps character's burden directly onto adolescent experience of external and internal pressures.</p> <p>Values realism and consequences in fictional identification.</p>

Experiential Statements	Transcript	Exploratory Noting
<p>Fictional identification blends fantasy and realism: powers are desirable both for their escapist allure and for their potential to ease everyday struggles.</p> <p>The adolescent reader finds meaning in responsibility toward others (saving civilians, helping out) as central to why fictional heroes fight, deepening identification through moral purpose.</p>	<p>There's actual consequences all the time. There's civilians. The point is, in most of those movies, you just kind of see them fight, but there's no real civilians. In this case, they actually do show the civilians. They show them dying, and then it's far more realistic, and it's far heavier as a show. And then, of course, you understand more why the character feels so compelled to have to do things. Because usually, you see them fight. It's like, why do they have to fight? No one's getting injured anyway. Because you just see the fight. You see cars flying around, but then the whole city's empty. In Invincible, you see him fighting, and as he's fighting, you can see there's the civilians trying to run away, and he's trying to save them at the same time. So that also shows... I think it's a much better representation and shows you far more why they actually do feel so compelled to fight and why they feel like they're so pressured.</p> <p>And do you think that you, like any other characters that you mentioned, did things that you wish you could do?</p> <p>I mean, of course, superpowers always look nice. Yeah, superpowers are pretty cool. Everyone would like to have superpowers. That's always the cool one. Yeah, I guess that's kind of the point, that having superpowers and actually being able to help out, that's always...</p> <p>If you can think about it, what do you think superpowers actually mean?</p> <p>What do you mean? As in, like, how... Like, what would it be like to have superpowers? I mean, of course, we live in a world where there isn't super villain aliens. So it'd be, I guess, superpowers in a world like this would be more of... Just to really just make certain aspects of your life a little more convenient. Like, say, like, you have flight, you would just fly around. It's far more easy to transport. Let's say you have super strength, you would help out with, like, building things. I guess if someone's stuck under, like, a tree or something, you can help them out. So it's far less as in, like, superpowers, where it allows you to defend yourself from super threats. It's more of, like, having superpowers, because it makes your everyday life a bit more convenient.</p> <p>And do you think that you've seen any of your personal struggles represented in either Peter Parker or... What's the character? Invincible.</p> <p>But what's his name?</p> <p>Mark.</p> <p>Or Mark.</p>	<p>Highlights realism and stakes; identification tied to responsibility towards others</p> <p>Materialization of fictional powers linked to altruism</p> <p>Reimagines fantastical powers in practical, real-world terms; grounds fantasy in ordinary life.</p>

Experiential Statements	Transcript	Exploratory Noting
<p>Fictional identification supports relativisation of personal struggles, offering perspective that eases adolescent stress by contextualising challenges.</p> <p>Characters' heavier burdens serve as a mirror and contrast, helping the participant recognise both similarity (responsibility, pressure) and difference (fictional extremes vs. real life)</p>	<p>I guess, kind of. I mean, of course, I don't have the struggles of having to save the world, but it's the struggles of school, and then your own personal life, trying to balance that. That's the real place where I compare my struggles. Because, of course, school is big workload. I get home, I work, I sleep. I get home, I work, I sleep. But then on the side, I also want to do my own things. I want to do sports. I want to go to the gym. I want to play video games. I want to enjoy time with friends. And school kind of doesn't... Of course, it's not that bad yet. But it really... I used to never do homework on weekends. Now I actually spend an entire day of a weekend doing homework. So it's really... It takes away time from the things you want to do. And I guess that's kind of where I relate. So, yeah.</p> <p>And do you think that any of these characters have made you either reflect about your past or your future?</p> <p>I guess there's some reflection. Maybe less of the past, but more of right now. It shows me that it could be worse. So it shows me that other people have it far worse than me. So it makes me kind of appreciate that I'm still in the stage where I still can do my own stuff. And I don't have to spend my whole life studying or doing other things or not even be able to go to school. So in terms of that, it makes me reflect of like, I guess, yeah, past, present and future. Because it makes me appreciate everything a bit more.</p> <p>Can you explain that a little more? Because like, how does it make you like... How does it ease? I don't understand.</p> <p>Because you see... Well, it's the idea of... I think like, of course, I personally, I see my own life. And it's kind of a bubble. It's like, oh, look at me. I have all these struggles from school so hard. But then I see these shows and then it makes me kind of open up more. It makes me think more in like, okay, other people's lives are crazier. Because they also have characters, for example, that also go kind of through these struggles. But they have a much worse because either there's constant like... Because like war and all those like much more terrible things. It makes me think, okay, I'm much better off than most. And that then, of course, eases it a bit. Because I think to myself, okay, it could be far worse. I'm in a private school in a foreign country.</p> <p>Does it relativise, I guess, or make it relative?</p> <p>Yeah. Yeah, of course, it's relative as in... In a sense that it contextualises your life. Yes. Like I said, I live a very quiet and peaceful life compared to like maybe 90% of the population.</p> <p>What do you mean by bubble?</p>	<p>Identifies with characters through analogy; balances fictional stakes with academic/adolescent pressures.</p> <p>Highlights rhythm of responsibility vs. personal desires; sees parallels in heroes' overburdened lives.</p> <p>Fiction used for perspective-taking and gratitude.</p> <p>Fiction provides a way to relativize and contextualize his own life.</p>

Experiential Statements	Transcript	Exploratory Noting
<p>Fictional identification generates moral frameworks and ideals (e.g., responsibility, altruism) that shape decision-making, often subconsciously.</p> <p>Identification supports a translation of narrative morals into lived action, where helping others in real life reflects values drawn from characters like Spider-Man.</p>	<p>That, of course, like if a bad thing happens, most people's instant idea is, okay, this is only happening to me. I'm struggling through this. This is not fair. Life is not fair. And I guess watching shows and seeing other characters struggle breaks that bubble. And then it lets you leave the bubble and let's you say, okay, I'm not the only one with struggles in life. There's probably people with much worse struggles than me. And I should see things more optimistically. I shouldn't... I'm not the only one with problems in life. I have people I can talk to. I live a better life than most. So that's kind of what it does.</p> <p>And do you think that any of your choices have ever been directly influenced by the stories that you've consumed?</p> <p>Uh, probably. Maybe subconsciously. I don't consciously think, okay, what would Spider-Man do? Of course. I guess subconsciously you get these ideals and then you make decisions based on those.</p> <p>What do you mean by ideals?</p> <p>Because it's media at the end of the day. It makes you consume because most have morals and stories. And you take in those morals and stories and then that kind of creates this ideal. For example, like Spider-Man, the big thing is great power, great responsibility. And that's kind of an ideal in a way. It makes you think, okay, I have a talent. I have something I can do and I should use this responsibly. I should use it to help others or I should use it to help myself. And I guess even if you don't consciously think about that, you subconsciously because of what you've consumed, and the more you consume it, the more you get used to it.</p> <p>And do you think that that principle shows up in your life?</p> <p>Probably. I mean, there's times where I do think to myself, okay, I'm more privileged and I have to help out. Like when, for example? For example, I'm part Palestinian with everything that's going on. As a family, we decided we're going to help out. We helped one of my dad's, one of the people working in my dad's company, we helped them leave the country and help them stay safe from what's happening right now. So that because it was one of his co-workers, her daughter and her parents, they were in Gaza. So we remotely helped them leave the country because we, I feel like we do have that responsibility to help others with what we're privileged with, because we do have the funds to help them get out. So I feel like we have the responsibility to help them out. So I guess that's one part of life where that was applied.</p> <p>How do you feel about that?</p> <p>I mean, it makes you feel good. It makes you feel like you've helped. And that idea of helping others helps yourself, where you kind of, you feel good about yourself. You feel like you did something good. That makes you feel good. And yeah.</p>	<p>Fiction used to normalize difficulties; creates solidarity and optimism</p> <p>Suggests indirect influence of fictional role models; ideals absorbed through repeated exposure</p> <p>Articulates a moral principle internalized from fiction</p> <p>Real-life decision framed as responsibility linked to privilege; parallels fictional ideals.</p>

Experiential Statements	Transcript	Exploratory Noting
<p>Fictional identification can manifest as temporary incorporation of character traits influencing behaviour, style, and self-image.</p> <p>Characters like James Bond embody aspirational ideals of masculinity, adventure, and competence, which adolescents project onto themselves, even if briefly.</p>	<p>Do you think that that in some ways you've incorporated characteristics of any of the characters in your own personality?</p> <p>Yeah. Again, maybe subconsciously. I mean, there's this like running joke where it's like post-movie personality, where you kind of take on the person that like, you start behaving a bit like the character you watched.</p> <p>What's that? Explain that to me.</p> <p>There's this joke where it's like, if you watch a movie, and it's like, for example, like as a guy, you watch a cool like, hell yeah, guy movie. And then you see a character and then you kind of feel like, after the movie, you feel like that character because it's so immersive.</p> <p>Okay. You feel influenced by the aesthetic?</p> <p>Yeah, I guess. Like the way you speak, the way you walk, and kind of like for temporarily.</p> <p>Has that ever happened to you?</p> <p>Yes, all the time. I watch a movie and like, I try not to because it's a bit weird. But like, after I watch a movie, I feel like, damn, I could be that guy. That's so... Um, like, it's always after watching, for example, James Bond movies. Like, you feel like you're a super badass agent in Monaco, solving crime and like...</p> <p>What about James Bond is appealing?</p> <p>I guess it's just that, I mean, he's kind of like, uh, one of those, um, like I said, like hell yeah characters. He's a guy, he's a, he has a cool car. There's cool chicks. There's, um, he gets to do cool, he gets to do cool stuff. There's explosions. There's, he's skydiving. He has a, he has a gun. He's, um, he's fighting bad guys. And I guess that's kind of like appealing to most guys because it's cool. As like, quote unquote. Um, and then when a guy sees that, he's like, damn, that could be me. I could so do that.</p> <p>Do you think it's appealing to you?</p> <p>Yes. I really like the, I really like the James Bond movies. I like, a lot of action movies tend to appeal to me. Also like, like superhero action movies appeal to me a lot. Um, and even though most people wouldn't consider them good movies, I just like, I like the, I like the action. I like the, the beating of bad guys. It's, it feels cool to me. I don't know. I don't know why.</p> <p>What is this feeling cool to you? Can you explain that?</p> <p>Yeah, it's the, um, like I said, it's the whole story, like about a, about a guy who fights bad guys and he gets to drive cool cars. I like cars. I like, just like a guy that drives cool cars. Um, the guy like he's beating up bad guys. Like it's, it's almost satisfying to see. So yeah.</p>	<p>Temporary incorporation of character traits into self presentation.</p> <p>Immediate but short-lived identification with admired characters.</p> <p>Attraction to aesthetic, lifestyle, and masculinity ideal embodied in character.</p> <p>Enjoyment of action tied to satisfaction and aspirational fantasies.</p>

Experiential Statements	Transcript	Exploratory Noting
<p>Fictional identification is guided by selective appropriation of ideals: adolescents filter traits (cars, action, "coolness") while privileging morality and heroism as core.</p> <p>Across narratives, the adolescent gravitates to characters who embody altruism, restraint, and a protective ethic, reinforcing identification with ideals of goodness and non-violence.</p>	<p>And do you think that, uh, you were talking a little bit about ideals. Do you think that ideals come into the play in these things?</p> <p>Yeah, that's, that's kind of, um, some people see this bad where it's like, okay, you're admiring a guy who, uh, gets like a, a, like, it depends how you look at it. There's a way we look at it, which is like, okay, the cool car, the, the like kind of, the kind of like badass aura the guy has. And then other people may look at it as, um, the guy who gets with a new chick, every movie, the guy who's, um, killing people. So I guess it kind of depends how you look at it. And then that gives you the ideal. But generally as a guy, I see the, I see the world of the good things in my opinion, which is the cool car, the beating of bad guys, the being a hero. And that ideal of, um, being a good guy, um, I guess comes to play.</p> <p>Do you think that you see any similarities between like all of the characters that you mentioned? You mentioned, um, you mentioned Marcus. That was his name, right?</p> <p>Mark.</p> <p>Mark, Mark. You mentioned Mark. You mentioned James Bond. You mentioned Peter Parker. Do you think there's anything that brings them together?</p> <p>Um, it's that, I guess it's the being, being the, being the good guy, being the, being the hero, being the guy that saves people. Um, it's just, uh, something that I, I just genuinely like those characters. I also watched, um, Vinland Saga, the anime. And there, the one who really liked the main character stood out to me was Thor's, which is the father of the main character.</p> <p>What's the, what's the saga?</p> <p>Vinland Saga.</p> <p>Vinland Saga.</p> <p>Yeah. And, uh, the main, the, the, well, he died pretty early on, but I feel like it was a character that, uh, quite, uh, like that I liked a lot.</p> <p>Can you explain a bit about him?</p> <p>He was, uh, so he was the father of the eventual main character and he was this, um, he was this, I mean, this, this is Vikings. Uh, so he used to be a Viking, but then he kind of stepped away from it because he realised no violence is in the way I can live a much more peaceful life. I can do good things without having to be violent. Um, and then he kind of steps back and it's kind of this like stoic attitude towards life where it's like, I won't hurt anyone, but if you're hurting others, I will stop you from hurting others. And I guess that kind of every character, except for someone like James Bond has that. Spider-Man has the no kill policy. Mark Invincible also doesn't like to kill. He sees life as precious and valuable. I guess James Bond does kill. So that's kind of the only one that doesn't.</p>	<p>Acknowledges multiple interpretations of ideals; chooses to focus on the heroic over the morally questionable.</p> <p>Unifying theme across admired characters; emphasis on altruism and moral positioning.</p> <p>Admiration for a character defined by restraint, peace, and protective morality.</p> <p>Compares moral codes across characters</p>

Experiential Statements	Transcript	Exploratory Noting
<p>Fictional identification consolidates around the ideal of being a “good guy”, reflecting a moral compass that values altruism, responsibility, and constructive use of power.</p> <p>Through characters, the adolescent articulates a personal ethic of goodness, rejecting destructive or self-serving ideals and embracing responsibility as central to identity.</p>	<p>But it's that idea of having, uh, doing good with, uh, and trying to like minimise the damage. Um, it's that idea of wanting to do good without having to like kill others and kind of be like exactly like the bad guy.</p> <p>Like, are you any different, um, if you're also killing people?</p> <p>So it's that idea of, um, trying to do as much good as possible. I guess that resonates.</p> <p>A little bit before you said, like you described them as good guys and I was wondering if, if it's important for you, uh, that concept of being a good guy. How do you feel about it?</p> <p>I think, yeah, it's, it's, it's important for me because I think, um, you as a human being, of course, like there's going to be bad, like again, quote unquote, it depends how you see good or bad, but there's going to be bad people. There's going to be good people. And what's the point of just being a bad person? I don't see a point in that. So it's not being like, there's some people that say, oh, if I had powers, I would take over the world. It's like, I don't, I don't resonate with that. I would see myself more as a person. I would try to help others. Of course, maybe. I don't know what responsibility comes with power. Maybe there comes an arrogance, but I personally would try to do as much good as possible. I feel like there is, um, there's no point in being a bad person. It's a waste. It's a waste of energy.</p> <p>There's no point in being a bad person.</p> <p>No, I see it. I see it as a waste of energy. There's, um, I, I understand when, of course, there's the people that live bad lives. So they become a bad person out of the bad lives. That's not what I mean. I mean, a person, for example, like let's say a super rich guy, loving family, um, always had a good life. And then they try to be gangsters. I think that's just, okay. I think that's a bit ridiculous. I feel like if you have the tools to be a good person, which I feel everyone does, you should try your best to be a good person. There's no point in her, like being, being someone who like hates others. I see it as it's a waste of energy. In my opinion.</p> <p>Um, that was really cool. Yeah. Thank you very much.</p>	<p>Prioritises moral difference between hero and villain; draws boundary of identification.</p> <p>Rejects destructive fantasies; aligns with altruistic ideals.</p> <p>Strong value statement; moral identity clearly foregrounded.</p> <p>Generalizes fictional moral lessons into a worldview and ethical stance</p>

## Annex J - Madison's Interview

Experiential Statements	Transcript	Exploratory Noting
<p>Fictional content functions as a medium for immersion and imaginative transport, where the participant seeks to “exist in the same realm as these characters.”</p> <p>The participant uses fiction as a way to explore human experience and perspective-taking, linking it to curiosity about uniqueness and identity.</p> <p>Fictional identification is framed as co-imagining; blending their own imagination with that of creators, reinforcing continuity with childhood play.</p>	<p>So I think we can, you know, start with basically, you know, a very simple question, which is: if you could tell me a little bit about, like, the type of entertainment you usually consume – whether that's TV shows, movies.</p> <p>It depends. I'll, like, watch almost anything as long as it's interesting, and that's, like, super broad and super subjective, but, like, for me it needs to either be, like, a supernatural of some time; if it is going to be nonfiction it needs to be about, like, humans in some way. Like, it should be about biology, or it should be about psychology, or, like, criminology, or something like that. But mostly, for the most part, it's, like, I really love horror movies and horror TV shows. I also, like.. it's a little hard to say, because recently I haven't been with the IV – like, there's just no time to, like, do it – but I will watch long-form content if I do have the time. I really enjoy.. I don't know. I'm really, like, I like to watch things that – there's so much. Cinematography is, like, gorgeous; like, that's good for me. I'm, like, very visual, and so, like, I want to be able to see it and, like, feel it the same way that, like, I would if I was in that world. So a lot of things I'm, like, looking to exist in the same realm as these characters are.</p> <p>What do you mean by human?</p> <p>Like, I think humans are so interesting – like, from history to mythology to the things we believe – so, like, I want to know about other people's human experience: like, why we are the way we are, like, what's going on, like, other people's perspective and stuff. Because, like, everybody is one in a million, but, like, I'd like to hear your perspective of what being one in a million is like.</p> <p>Okay, in the supernatural – why do you think you're drawn to it?</p> <p>I just think it's cool. Like, I think so many things that, like, could happen or could be possible are just, like, interesting. Like, yeah, sure – if you were a ghost, what would happen? Like, let's figure out how this works. And I think the imagination is not utilised enough, and it's, like, that's – at least for me as a kid – like, that was the favourite part of, like, running around on a playground. It was, like, imagining things. So, like, okay, someone else's imagination – let's take a tour; let's see how it's going for them.</p> <p>So does the supernatural enable your imagination?</p> <p>I think it's, like, both – like my imagination into, like, what could be, and someone else's – like, this is what I think could be – and it's kind of like they're telling me their imagination, and I think that's cool.</p> <p>Okay. Okay. Does perspective come into the realm?</p> <p>Yeah, for sure, because I also really like action movies, but my one, like, giant problem with action movies is there's, like, zero women, and if they do, they, like, never pass the Bechdel test, which is..</p> <p>The what?</p> <p>The Bechdel Test.</p> <p>Bechdel test. What's that?</p>	<p>Broad taste, but with a clear attraction to themes about human experience or the supernatural.</p> <p>Explicitly links viewing to immersion and identification with fictional worlds.</p> <p>Interest in perspective-taking, connecting fictional content with human uniqueness.</p> <p>Positions fiction as an extension of imagination, both personal and borrowed.</p>

Experiential Statements	Transcript	Exploratory Noting
<p>Fictional identification is constrained by lack of representation, with exclusionary tropes and stereotypes.</p> <p>The participant's growing critical awareness reflects a developmental shift: what once allowed enjoyment now feels limiting, showing how identity growth reshapes fictional identification.</p> <p>Representation in fiction is tied to both relatability and visibility, both of which underpin identification.</p>	<p>Two women in your movie or TV show need to be able to talk about something that isn't about a man, like, whatsoever. It can just be, like, the weather. Okay? And a surprising amount of movies do not pass this, like, super stupid test. It's, like, super easy, super interesting, but, like, the fact that they don't pass it kind of can give you an idea of the female characters and..</p> <p>So they mention the men – is that it? So they pass if they don't mention men?</p> <p>Yeah – like, it can just be one conversation to another woman going, like, "Oh, how's the weather?" "It's great." You pass – congratulations. And there's just, like, no interaction. So a lot of, like, fiction and movies are geared towards men, and about men, and centred around them. So the female characters are doing the same thing, and as a girl, I'm like, okay, no – I'd also like to, like, be an assassin; like, try and, like, diversify what we're doing here. So it's... it's a little... that's kind of where me and media, like, clash and stuff, and I don't think I'm being represented. But I feel like that's where, like, everybody clashes with any media – like, we all want to be... we all want to see ourselves on, like, the big screen.</p> <p>Can you talk to me a bit more about that representation? What does that mean to you?</p> <p>Like, it can be, like, just relatable – like, oh yeah, I would do that too – but also just seeing someone like me and, like, doing whatever. Like, having something in common with the character, especially because a lot of modern media focusses around the everyman. So trying to... what we categorise as norm characters, and setting that baseline as generally a white, cis, hetero male, and anything outside of that is categorised as abnormal or other. And so it's really difficult to get representation if you do not exist in that group. And it doesn't... it doesn't need to be, like, an entire story about them – just, like, seeing more characters around them. That's just kind of what... what we're striving for. And even, like, I'm pushing for main characters. There's a lot of stereotypes you'll see, like, characters start to fill if they, like, fit into one of, like, the categories of, like, being black or gay. And, like, on Disney Channel, for example, there's always, like, the sassy black friend, which is just, like, okay, like, sure, that might be accurate, but, like, that is not... the trope should not designate how you write a character. It should... it should be a product of multiple people writing a good character and a pattern that we notice.</p> <p>And do you think that there is... you said that you watched everything. Do you think that there's a genre you prefer, or just the commonalities between the stories? Is that what draws you in?</p> <p>Yeah, it's definitely the commonalities, because, like, I love a good comedy show just as much as I love, like, horror. And there's not any reason to it – like, I just enjoy... these are movies I enjoy. And then... but, like, with certain genres you are likely to see, or less likely to see, like, certain things. Like, for anime, the way they write female characters is absolutely horrendous. Like, when I was 10 years old, it was, like, fine, but, like, as I've grown up, I'm like, this is, like...</p> <p>What's horrendous about it?</p>	<p>Expresses frustration at lack of female representation; desire to see herself in diverse roles</p> <p>Universalizing statement—links fictional identification to self-representation.</p> <p>Relatability and recognition as central to identification</p> <p>Highlights systemic exclusion, shaping who can identify with main characters.</p> <p>Critique of reductive stereotypes that limit genuine identification</p> <p>Indicates developmental change: growing awareness of representation and its effects on identification.</p>

Experiential Statements	Transcript	Exploratory Noting
<p>Fictional identification is recognised as a process of vicarious living, enabled by even small similarities</p> <p>Participant is wary of harmful or unethical projections by authors.</p> <p>Representation issues are extended beyond gender to the authorial influence, with awareness that writers project themselves into characters, shaping how audiences can or cannot identify.</p> <p>The participant acknowledges the complexity of identification by admitting connection with a “terrible” character.</p>	<p>Well, when they, like, over-sexualise, like, minor characters – and it's, like, that's not great. And then, like, also, again, like, the entirety of the female character's, like, motivation and feelings and, like, anything about her is geared towards the male character. So, like, she's going, “What is he feeling? Like, oh, I want to do what he wants to do.” And it's, like, no person acts like that all the time – like, man, woman, baby – don't care. Like, nobody's constantly going, like, “This is someone I have to, like, constantly be looking out for.” Like, there's a difference between care and, like, kind of being obsessively, like, perfect for it.</p> <p>But is it like a cateFangg to?</p> <p>Yeah, exactly – I guess that's what I'm trying to say. Like, it is a fantasy, I guess, for these writers to be, like, “All these women love me, and they'll take care of me, and they like me no matter what I do,” and that's when I'm like, okay.</p> <p>Do you sometimes think about the roles of the writers and how the writers influence the stories?</p> <p>Yeah, for sure, because – if you haven't read it, I don't know if I would recommend reading it – it's a really weird book, but <i>A Stranger in a Strange Land, Strange Place, Stranger in a Strange Book</i>, and the main character's, like, this alien. And it starts out as this really interesting novel about, like, what... like, what's the government doing? Is the government right? Kind of political, sci-fi, like, exploration. And then it devolves into, like, this cult religion thing, and you can tell, like, there's... the author wrote an author in, sort of. Like, there's a super cool guy, and he's an author, and, like, he, like, kind of sounds exactly like my name, and it's like, okay – like, he looks really similar to me, and he, like, acts really similar to me. And it's like, I definitely think writers – like, some writers it's blatantly obvious like that, and sometimes it's just being, like, as generic as, like, the character not having a personality. So, like, if you, like, even fit some of the characteristics this character has – maybe you're tall, or maybe you're short, and the character's tall or short – you can then be like, “That's me,” and so, like, whatever fantasy you want to live out that that character's currently, like, living out, you can then vicariously live through them.</p> <p>How do you feel about that – vicariously living through them?</p> <p>I generally don't have a problem with it as long as it doesn't promote, like, kind of, like, creepy views. And I know that that then becomes, like, a whole thing of, like, what do we categorise as, like, not okay and stuff, but it's, like, the amount of writers who have been, like, arrested for, like, being a pedophile, or, like, just, like, really weird crimes and stuff is, like, really concerning. And if you look at their media, a lot of the people who, like, will ingest the media and stuff – you'll look through it and you'll be like, “How did we not notice? This is literally something they, like, promote and, like, kind of say is okay.”</p> <p>So, okay. Okay. And do you think that there's any... you were talking a little bit about characters. Do you think there's any characters that come to mind that you relate to?</p> <p>I relate to Fang Runin, and she's a terrible character to relate to – Fang Runin. From <i>The Poppy Wars</i>.</p> <p>Can you explain to me a bit about <i>The Poppy Wars</i>?</p>	<p>Critique of unrealistic female portrayals; sees this as limiting authentic identification.</p> <p>Recognizes writer's role in shaping narratives and projecting their own fantasies</p> <p>Identifies the mechanism of fictional identification as partial similarity enabling vicarious experience</p> <p>Concern about the ethics of identification when problematic content is normalized</p> <p>Explicit identification with a morally complex or “bad” character</p>

Experiential Statements	Transcript	Exploratory Noting
<p>Fiction enables the participant to channel personal emotions through morally complex characters.</p> <p>The participant uses characters arc as a metaphor for developmental transitions.</p> <p>Identification is not only aspirational but also consolatory, offering recognition of negative feelings.</p>	<p>Yeah, it's, like, a fantasy fiction – or historical fiction, actually – it's a better description of what happened in China for the actual Poppy Wars, which is known as the Opium Wars. And it's, like, her – like, she starts out as a young, like, bright, like, "I want to do whatever it takes to kind of join this military academy," and then, in this world, this version Japan attacks and, like, ravages the countryside and what is China in this world. Okay? And it replicates... Do you know what the Rape of Nanking is?</p> <p>I do know what the Rape of Nanking is.</p> <p>There's an entire chapter dedicated to that, and it's, like, really – yeah – and it's kind of, like, through fantasies, like, going through it. And this character – we see her as, like, she starts to face the horrors of war and what's going on to, like, the moral, like, sheltered upbringing she's kind of gotten to, like, do so far. And in the end she, like, decides the best idea to do is basically to, like, blow up Japan with her, like, superpowers or whatever. She, like, burns the whole thing to the ground – everybody's dead – like, there is no homeland anymore. And I relate to her for the sheer fact that, like, a lot of her character is about dealing with rage as well. And so, like, she's angry – she's, like, she's so furious about, like, what she couldn't do, what other people are doing – and that's, like, a really relatable level of just, like, what's going on. And even... even though she's, like, arguably a terrible person, because of how the book's written you, like, feel for her as a person. And you also... you also kind of want her to succeed, despite the fact that, like, her succeeding would be terrible for just about everybody else in her general vicinity.</p> <p>Why is she a terrible person in the book?</p> <p>Because she, like... she literally, like, kills all of the... like, she basically bombs Japan and, like, wipes out everybody because, like, they were committing war crimes. So, like, you understand her reasoning, you understand, like, how she feels, but you're just like, "Okay, that was a little too far." And the best part is, like, other characters come up to her, and they're like, "You can't feel sorry for what you did. Like, it's over – it happened," and, like, on the one hand you want her to feel better, because, like, anybody feeling that kind of, like, crummy and depressed is sad, but you're also like, "No – like, you kind of... you kind of did something that, like, deserves a little more retro, like, introspection into what... into what's going on," and she doesn't... she doesn't really do that. And it's kind of interesting to watch – like, as she grows more powerful, everybody's catered to her, and, like, but her fury never really subsides – like, her rage is still there. And I relate to that, because, just, like, sometimes no matter what you do you're always going to be angry about it, and, like, no matter how hard you try to, like, succeed, it's not as, like, real as you think it is.</p> <p>What do you mean by that? What do you mean?</p> <p>Like, so her success in the beginning of the book looked like going to this academy and, like, really just, like, getting good grades, and it was, like, "Oh yeah," but she didn't really think past that. And so, like, when the war comes she's like, "What is going on? Like, they didn't train us for this. This isn't how, like, this was supposed to go. I don't understand." And so, like, the clash of, like, maybe education or upbringing versus, like, real world I think is, like, kind of interesting to think about – especially, like, while, like, modern people are not living in that same situation. You can... you can still definitely see how, like, when you graduate high school – or maybe for some people it's university – like, you kind of get flung into the real world, and it's the level of, like, "This is... this is war – like, you kind of have to, like, fight to win." And I haven't quite experienced that, I don't think, but I think that's an interesting thought piece.</p>	<p>Participant summarizes Fang's arc, stressing ambition and determination</p> <p>Identification grounded in shared emotional experience.</p> <p>Recognition of moral ambiguity in identification – attraction despite destructive actions.</p> <p>Uses Fang's rage and failure of success as a metaphor for adolescent frustration.</p> <p>Extends fictional narrative to own life stage, mapping Fang's struggles onto adolescence/early adulthood transition.</p>

Experiential Statements	Transcript	Exploratory Noting
<p>Fictional identification with Fang becomes a mirror for the participant's anxieties about the future.</p> <p>Through Fang, the participant finds a model of agency and resistance.</p> <p>Identification also serves as a way to grapple with consequences, appreciating how fiction enforces accountability</p>	<p>Does that make you think about your own path in those areas?</p> <p>Yeah, for sure.</p> <p>In what way?</p> <p>Like, what am I going to do after university, and is it going to... I know what I want to do, but, like, just because I know what I want to do doesn't mean, like, is that what I'm going to actually do? And will my expectation of what's going to happen, like, be enough to maintain what, like, reality is actually going to throw at me?</p> <p>What do you want to do?</p> <p>Nursing.</p> <p>You want to nurse? Okay. Can you talk a bit more about this clash? Because you were talking about, you know, what something is theoretically taught and then reality.</p> <p>Yeah.</p> <p>Can you explain to me how you feel about that?</p> <p>Well, it's like we learn about gravity in physics class, and then, like – and then, like, sure, I know if you reach terminal velocity you should be fine, and that's how, like, cats and other creatures who, like, jump off of really high places, like, survive. Because they know how to, like, just go wide duFangg terminal velocity. And I know that in theory – it doesn't mean I'm going to be, like, jumping off a building anytime soon. Like, there's a level of, like, the consequences in theory are bad, but then, like, in reality the consequences are devastating. And this Fang – or Fang's actions – make you think about this, because, like, I don't... I don't think she was really prepared for the real world, despite, like, how people warned her. Like, there was a level of, like, she – she just couldn't... I don't think she could have ever, like, understood it.</p> <p>She couldn't understand it. And do you think that Fang did things that you wish you could do?</p> <p>Just, like, a level of standing up for herself that, like, I wish, like, everybody has the opportunity to do in their life – like, the level to prove other people wrong. I think everyone should have the opportunity that she, like, has multiple to do. Reading her... reading her perspective is interesting, because, like, it would be really funny if she did this – like, this is a terrible idea, the consequences would not work – but it would be really funny. And then she does that, and you're like, "Oh no." Like, the reason why, like, it was, like, jokingly funny is because consequences happen. And that's actually one thing I really like about this writer – the consequences are always, like, realistically tied. Like, any action any character takes has a consequence, and it doesn't feel like they ever escape it, which is real, and happens in real life.</p> <p>So the characters don't get away with things.</p> <p>Yeah.</p> <p>Is that what you mean?</p>	<p>Connects Fangs's struggle to their own uncertainty about the future</p> <p>Uses Fang's actions as a metaphor to think through theory vs lived consequences.</p> <p>Identifies with Fang's agency and defiance, something the participant desires for themselves.</p> <p>Values realism of consequence in fiction, seeing it as reflective of life lessons.</p>

Experiential Statements	Transcript	Exploratory Noting
<p>Identification with Fang's moral conflict mirrors the participant's own tension between morality and necessity.</p> <p>Fiction enables reflection on realism vs morality, a central adolescent concern about living ethically in a flawed world</p>	<p>Yeah, and that's real. And that can even be, like, if they do a good thing – they don't get away with it. Like, someone thanks them for it, but, like, just every action having a consequence, I think, is, like, a message that everybody kind of needs to understand, whether that... like, the action is good or bad.</p> <p>You think that's true in life?</p> <p>Like, to a certain degree. Like, you're not going to get, like, an award if you, like, help a grandma across the street, but she'll thank you, and that's a consequence.</p> <p>Uh-huh. So, yeah, and you touched a bit about it, but do you think that you've seen any of your personal struggles reflected in Fang?</p> <p>I don't know – maybe her struggle with herself and, like, what is the right thing to do. Like, you're always – at least, as a person – like, I'm always trying to figure out: am I doing the right thing? Like, is this the moral... is this the moral teachings I was taught, or is this, like, a time when I have to decide: is this the right thing to do? And, like, if it is the wrong thing to do, but it's, like, the necessary thing to do, is it still something I should be doing?</p> <p>Do you think that morality is important to you?</p> <p>Yeah – like, I think decently important, yeah. Which is weird, because I also think I'm quite a realist, and if you talk to anybody they'll kind of say that sometimes morality and realism, like, clash to a certain degree – that, like, to live in reality is to theoretically be immoral.</p> <p>Explain that to me a bit more.</p> <p>No matter what we're currently doing – like, the jacket I'm weaFangg, the pants I'm weaFangg, the chair I'm sitting in – like, somebody else probably had to suffer to get to where I am. The moral thing to do would be to somehow give this back and, like, repay their kindness – that suffeFangg that they, like, gave so I can be here. Realistically, the thing I'm going to keep doing is I'm going to go keep studying in the library, and I'm going to keep moving, because, like, their suffeFangg does not mean that, like, I don't have struggles of my own, and it means, like, you have to kind of keep going in life. You have to kind of keep going in life, and there are so many... like, have you watched <i>The Good Place</i>?</p> <p>Can you explain... I don't think I remember.</p> <p>Eleanor Selesdrop, like, dies and goes to the Good Place.</p> <p>Yes. Yes. I've never seen it, but I know what you're talking about.</p>	<p>Values accountability in fiction; links it to real life lessons</p> <p>Identifies with Fang's moral dilemmas, reflecting own struggles with right vs necessary.</p> <p>Conflict between moral ideals and pragmatic realism.</p> <p>Acknowledges systemic moral compromise; connects this to realism over ideal morality.</p>

Experiential Statements	Transcript	Exploratory Noting
<p>Fiction helps the participant test moral limits—seeing consequences makes ethical complexity feel real.</p> <p>Identification involves wrestling with systemic morality vs personal ethics: fiction offers a space to rehearse this tension.</p>	<p>There's one part where they're discussing, like, what it means to be a good person, and they're like, "Oh, like, this is... this is what being a good person is," and it's like, okay, but the world nowadays is so complex and so interwoven – like, interwoven to be – what, like, what used to be a good person – like, feeding the poor, like, doing this, like, maybe just not, like, spitting on other people – is now, like, is now not a requirement to be a good person. To be a good person is to, like, maybe mind your own business – like, just be polite to people and, like, some basic stuff – where, like, to be a good person used to be, like, just don't commit murder. Like, there's a level – to exist in today's world is to not be moral.</p> <p>Okay, so are you talking about passivity, in a way?</p> <p>Yeah. Yeah – like, you can't... you can't fight the system from within the system, and I think ultimately, like, a system that relies on, like, monetary gain is going to... like, if somebody's succeeding, a lot of the time somebody else is failing. And this society and the world we live in – it is difficult for you to succeed without profiting off of somebody's failure and try and help them succeed at the same time.</p> <p>And do you think that this struggle is in any way related to fiction?</p> <p>Yeah – like, some fictions focus on it, where it's, like... there's, like, some fictions where it focusses on how, like, you gotta put yourself first, and you gotta, like, outsmart, outplay, like, everybody else, and you're...</p> <p>What was the show called? <i>Poppy</i>...</p> <p><i>The Poppy Wars</i></p> <p><i>The Poppy Wars</i>. Does <i>The Poppy Wars</i> – talk about that?</p> <p>Not really,</p> <p>not really.</p> <p>No – like, it definitely talks about morality in relation to your actions.</p> <p>In what ways?</p> <p>Like... like, she theoretically bFanggs up, like, "Oh, if you just killed everyone it would, like, be problem solved," and then, like, when she does it, it's, like, the moral... the moral weight that it actually carries is a lot more than she thought it would be in theory, and she realises, like, what she's done, and she can't just, like, Command-Z – like, there is no undo.</p> <p>That's a funny expression.</p> <p>So, like, that's really interesting, at least, like, from a philosophical standpoint.</p> <p>Have you thought much about... have you thought much about that decision – when she, like, kills everyone? How do you feel about that? How do you feel about that decision?</p>	<p>Reflects sense that contemporary morality is diluted/complex</p> <p>Structural critique: ethical compromises built into social/economic systems</p> <p>Values fiction that shows irreversible consequences and moral complexity</p>

Experiential Statements	Transcript	Exploratory Noting
<p>Fictional identification persists even when characters become morally compromised, sustained by shared values like loyalty and care.</p> <p>Through Fangs's flawed morality, the participant explores balancing destructive actions with relational commitment, reflecting on their own friendships</p>	<p>At the beginning, because it's, like, the author uses such a deep metaphor for it, I was like, "Okay – like, I don't care," and...</p> <p>What's the metaphor for it?</p> <p>She's just like, "I'm exploding like a volcano; like, I run over trees and plants and animals, and the island is, like, nothing, and there is nothing, and I'm a pain." It's like, okay, whatever – like, life's rough. And then... and then you realise what she's done, and you're like, "Oh no." Like, yes, you wanted her to face what she thought were her enemies, but you didn't... you didn't want her to be a bad person. I don't think anybody wants anybody to be a bad person. And so, like, watching her be this, like, bad person – you're kind of, like... like, tension just starts to, like, build a little bit; you get, like, a little bit more uncomfortable.</p> <p>But because she started out on what you thought was a good character arc and then she drops off?</p> <p>Yeah – like, she's still... she's still... the character arc is still very interesting and, like, cool. She hits a point where you're like, "I can't classify you as a good person anymore." Okay.</p> <p>So, but did you stop relating to her at that point?</p> <p>No – no, no. I think that's really cool. Well, it's mostly because of her relationships with her friends – like, that she still really cares about, like, these people close to her, which makes sense for selfish creatures – like, we care for our own – but, like, her level of care and commitment to her friends, despite her being, like, arguably a war criminal, is just interesting to, like, watch. And...</p> <p>How is she committed to her friends?</p> <p>Like, she will do just about anything for her friends. Her friends ask her to jump – she says, "How high?" Like, it's not... like, it's not something that she was, like, willing to part with, and I think that's, like, really interesting – from, like... her being able to, like, go get her friend across the sea, across the ocean, and be like, "I'll still be there for you," but, like, you're like, "But you've also taken, like, thousands of lives, and you've caused, like, so much pain for others, and you have no regard for human life – so, like, I don't... how do I balance that with what I see?"</p> <p>Do you think – discussing... you were talking about her friends – yeah... Do you think that... do you think you relate to the way that she handled her friends?</p> <p>Yeah – like, having that much care for someone is... it's, like, a good feeling, and it is... it is, like, intFangsic to human nature. Like, no matter who you are, you have something you care about, and it's probably at least one person.</p> <p>Are you like that with your friends?</p> <p>Yeah, I care for my friends, like, pretty deeply. I like to think they're pretty... they're pretty interesting people – like, I love my friends, but they're absolute freaks. So, like...</p>	<p>Emotional conflict in identification: attraction mixed with discomfort.</p> <p>Recognition of moral boundary crossed.</p> <p>Connection maintained through loyalty and relational care, even alongside destructive actions.</p> <p>Relates Fang's loyalty to own friendships, drawing parallel between fiction and lived relational values.</p>

Experiential Statements	Transcript	Exploratory Noting
<p>Fictional identification links friendship values in real life with loyalty in fiction, sustaining connection with characters</p> <p>Fang's ambition and drive resonate with the participant's own perfectionism and fear of failure, making identification aspirational but also self-reflective</p>	<p>Why are they interesting?</p> <p>Well, one of my friends is a homeschooled kid from the South.</p> <p>Mm-hmm – the south of...</p> <p>America. So she can kind of talk like this, and it gets a little country sometimes, and she was homeschooled – which normally would mean she's an absolute idiot – but her mom and her dad are philosophers and have, like, teaching degrees, which means she's actually pretty intelligent. And she's just, like, a very interesting person who enjoys art and who's, like... because she was raised to, like, talk about the way everything works, she's, like, a great conversationalist. And then another one's, like, a kid from Oregon who's, like, both British and American and has an interesting cultural blend, and, like, that's interesting discussion. Like, I... I don't actively go out and find people I think I can have a good conversation with, but, like, I guarantee you most of my friends and I, could have a mature, like, interesting conversation with about just about anything. Like, they're intelligent people who, like, do want to engage with you, and, like, that is interesting. And in fiction, you're not likely to see that just because it's not interesting to, like, see on screen – or sometimes in books – but it is interesting to have that in real life. And knowing that and, like, having that much care for other people is kind of what relates me back to fiction.</p> <p>So in fiction there doesn't seem to be that dynamic?</p> <p>No – like, not the actual conversation, but definitely, like, "Oh, you're smart. You're intelligent. I see that in you," and, "You're also, like, whatever – kind, cool," like, whatever aspect you want to throw in there – "and I admire that about you, and I'm friends with you, and I care about you." And, like, that you will see in real life, and I think that's interesting.</p> <p>Hmm. And do you think that Fang made you think about either your past or your future?</p> <p>Definitely both, yeah – like, she doesn't really care about her past, but it definitely, like... it was definitely a motivator to her future – like, it definitely affects her future. So I just think that's kind of, like, interesting.</p> <p>In what ways does her past affect her future?</p> <p>Like, she... she really wasn't gonna... it's kind of what gave her her drive – it gave her her, like, grit and her motivation to, like, no matter what, to pursue what she wants. And that's... that's kind of inspiFangg. Like, obviously, the harder your past is, the more you're probably gonna have motivation and grit and drive, but, like, she didn't mean to have that much of it, and it didn't... and she didn't need to aspire to be in that high of a place. Like, she aspires to be the greatest, the best – like, whatever – and I think that's pretty interesting and cool.</p> <p>Do you relate to that?</p> <p>Yeah – like, I definitely want to be... like, I have trouble doing things if I don't think I'm going to succeed at them, which is why I don't like playing basketball, because I know I'm bad at basketball. But, like, I don't mind doing other activities where, like, I think I'm already good enough at them, and to learn and to grow at them would be becoming better – to becoming the best. So, like, I see that in her, and I see that in me, and I think it's an interesting thought piece.</p>	<p>Values depth and intelligence in friendships; contrasts this with fiction, where such dynamics are less visible.</p> <p>Friendship/loyalty remains the key link between real life and fiction</p> <p>Sees Fang's past as the engine of her ambition; finds this inspiFangg.</p> <p>Direct self-recognition in Fang's ambition and fear of failure.</p>

Experiential Statements	Transcript	Exploratory Noting
<p>Fictional characters function as thought experiments, allowing safe reflection on ambition, effort, and consequences without imitation.</p> <p>Fang's story helps the participant articulate a personal belief: success requires pain and struggle, a lesson transferred into daily life.</p>	<p>Can you explain a bit more about that – what do you see in her and what do you see in yourself?</p> <p>Just that grit to kind of, like, keep going and to aspire to be the best in, like, whatever aspect or field you want to do.</p> <p>Uh-huh. Okay, so that's... that's the way that her past influences her future. And in what ways did it make you think about your own future?</p> <p>Just, like, is my grit going to actually get me to where I want to be?. Is the effort equal to, like, I guess, the standing of where I want to be in life? And if it isn't, what other variable am I missing?</p> <p>What other variables do you think there are?</p> <p>I think definitely, like, where you started. So if you started at a high place, like, it's... and you have a lot of grit and motivation to get to a high place, you're probably gonna end up in a high place. But it's hard to, like, go all the way up from... from the bottom. Mm-hmm.</p> <p>And do you think that any of your choices were directly influenced by Fang?</p> <p>No – like, I definitely think she's an interesting thought piece for me, and I use her to, like, consider what's going on and, like, as a way to look at the world around me. But I don't think I'm actively, like, "What would she do?"</p> <p>She's a thought piece – what do you mean by she's a thought piece?</p> <p>Like, you can look at her and you can kind of consider, like, in that world you're free of consequences. She's a theoretical that you can look at, and you can see what she would do, and that, like... that is something you can think about. I would never replicate any of her actions – just kind of in general. Like I said, she's kind of a terrible person, but, like, she does give you something to think about.</p> <p>Do you think that you've incorporated any of her characteristics in your own personality?</p> <p>Maybe her whole, like, pain is success – like, to get to success you're gonna have to go through pain.</p> <p>You feel that that's true?</p> <p>To a certain degree – like, the pain doesn't have to be, like, throwing yourself into a fire. It can just be, like, doing your homework really early in the morning. But, like, that kind of level – just, like, you're gonna have to struggle; you're gonna have to do things you don't like.</p> <p>That's painful (laughing)</p> <p>Yeah, that's painful (laughing) – so you're gonna have to do that, and if that's what it takes to get to where you want to be – do it. Get it done. That is success.</p> <p>And do you think that you've used any other characters as, like, a function of thought – or a thought piece, like you were saying?</p>	<p>Identifies with Fang's perseverance and ambition.</p> <p>Uses Fang to reflect on personal uncertainty about effort, success, and starting points.</p> <p>Frames Fang as a tool for reflection, not imitation.</p> <p>Extracts a guiding principle from Fang's arc and applies it to everyday struggles</p>

Experiential Statements	Transcript	Exploratory Noting
<p>Fiction engages the participant in multiple modes: identification, situational reflection, and philosophical curiosity, but not all characters invite personal connection.</p> <p>Beyond Rin, the participant gravitates toward ambiguous characters, suggesting that moral/psychological complexity is central to their fictional identification.</p>	<p>Not really. Like, there are two ways I, like, generally ingest media, and it's through the characters, or, like, their situation — and, like, maybe three, because of the style. I really like the style — like, what's going on: the way they're animated or drawn, or their description, and the world they're living in. The world they're living in is similar to mine, and it's interesting to look at and see, and it's, like, kind of not about the characters and more about the plot. And the individual characters — I don't think, like, I've had another character where it's easy to, one, draw connections from their reality to mine, and then to see aspects of myself in that character that I think I could either, A, like, tone down, or just kind of, like, I feel like are interesting to look at. There are characters who are interesting, like, just case studies — like Batman — like, why are you the way you are, and, like, what does this say about human nature, and, like, the philosophical point of, like, what does this mean. But I'm not exactly going, like... I'm not walking down the street going, "What would Batman do?" and then, like, beating up a criminal. That isn't exactly, like, how I ingest media. Does that make sense?</p> <p>So you find it interesting, but you don't relate to it?</p> <p>Not always.</p> <p>So... Would say that Fang is the one that sticks out to you?</p> <p>Yeah. Like, I really like <i>Girl, Interrupted</i>, because she has this moment — like, "Am I crazy, or is it just the time period?"</p> <p>What's <i>Girl, Interrupted</i>?</p> <p>It was a book and then got turned into a movie, and it's about a girl who, like... she tries to kill herself. She doesn't think she tried to kill herself, though. Okay? And she gets put into a hospital with a bunch of other people who — what she deems is crazy — and everyone else is like, "You need to pick yourself up. You need to get back on with your life. Like, you are not... you are not crazy. You do not belong here. Like, you're fine."</p> <p>Do you remember the name of the character?</p> <p>No, actually.</p> <p>Is this a movie with Winona Ryder?</p> <p>Yeah.</p> <p>I've seen it.</p> <p>To me, she wasn't the most interesting character. She was cool and definitely, like, a kind of treatise on, like, no self-pity; you gotta keep moving. But, like, the most interesting character to me was Lisa.</p> <p>Who's Lisa — is it Angelina Jolie?</p> <p>Yeah. Why was Lisa interesting to you?</p> <p>Because I don't... I can't tell if I actually think Lisa is crazy or not.</p>	<p>Distinguishes modes of engagement; not always character-driven identification.</p> <p>Differentiates between intellectual/philosophical interest and personal identification.</p> <p>Confirms Fang as the strongest point of identification</p> <p>Attraction to characters with ambiguity and contradiction</p>

Experiential Statements	Transcript	Exploratory Noting
<p>Fiction enables engagement with psychological ambiguity, fostering empathy for characters society deems “insane.”</p> <p>Identification involves humanising the stigmatised, suggesting the participant uses fiction to explore the boundaries of normality.</p>	<p>What do you mean?</p> <p>Like, in the book, they're like, “She's a sociopath. She's insane.” And I'm like, I can't tell if she is actually insane, because she shows so much attachment to people around her, yet no care at all. And, like, the way she expresses that might be absolutely unhinged, but I don't... I don't think she's insane. And so that was, like, an interesting thing to consider.</p> <p>Why don't you think that she's insane? What's normal about it, or what's regular about it?</p> <p>She's just so human. Like, I think all humans are a little bit crazy, and that, like, Fang to, I guess, the societal standard of within the normal of crazy... but the way they treat her is, like, just so blown out of proportion for, I think, like, how actually her psychology is developed.</p> <p>Does it make sense to you?</p> <p>Not really, but, like, I can kind of respect that.</p> <p>Respect that?</p> <p>Yeah – like, I don't... I don't understand rocket science, but I still think it's cool when, like, a rocket goes to the moon.</p> <p>Okay, I think that's it. Thank you very much for that – that was really cool.</p>	<p>Drawn to contradiction in characterization,</p> <p>Sees psychological complexity as part of being human; normalises “craziness.”</p> <p>Critique of societal labelling of mental health; empathy toward stigmatized characters</p> <p>Acknowledges limited understanding, but still respect/ admiration for complexity.</p>

## **Annex K - Isabella's Interview**

Isabella was not a particularly rich interview when it comes to strong identification with fictional characters; although, she did provide rich information on the subject of aesthetic engagement to fiction, as well as, younger and past identifications. The following is her summarized PETs.

---

### **PETs (Supplementary Analysis – Kenza)**

#### **PET 1. Aesthetic Gateways to Engagement**

- *Actors and recognizability as selectors* – “If I know it has good actors... Leonardo DiCaprio... you can usually guess the movie is gonna be good.”
- *Trailers and soundtracks as entry points* – “The trailer was good because of the music... Frank Ocean.”

#### **PET 2. From Wishful Identification to Realistic Constraints**

- *Childhood fantasies of being a mermaid* – “I had an obsession with being a mermaid... I really liked Cleo.”
- *Growing out of the fantasy with age* – “Realistically, no... I wouldn't like it anymore because your whole life would change.”

#### **PET 3. Curiosity Amid Fear – The Pull of the Unknown**

- *The ocean as fascination and threat* – “I'm scared of the ocean, but I also like things I'm scared of... the more you want to know about it to give you a sense of security.”
  - *Thrillers and horror as safe exploration of fear* – “Even though I'm scared and I won't be able to sleep, it's worth finishing the movie because I'm curious
-