

**REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN AMERICAN POP
CULTURE IN SELECTED TEXTS AND FILMS
(1936 – 2009)**

**A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

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(1936 – 2009)

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In partial fulfillment of the requirement of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that this thesis entitled “Representation of Women in American Pop Culture in Selected Texts and Films (1936 – 2009)” written by Zomuani Cherpoot for the award of Doctor of Philosophy in English and Culture Studies has been written under my supervision.

She has fulfilled all the required norms laid down under Ph.D. UGC Regulations 2019 of Mizoram University. The thesis incorporates the student’s bona fide research and no part of it has been submitted for award of any degree in this or any other University or Institute of Learning.

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DECLARATION

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August 2025

I, Zomuani Cherpoot, hereby declare that the subject matter of this thesis is the record of work done by me, that the contents of this thesis did not form basis of the award of any previous degree to me or to do the best of my knowledge to anybody else, and that the thesis has not been submitted by me for any research degree in any other University/Institute.

This is being submitted to the Mizoram University for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English and Culture Studies.

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(ZOMUANI CHERPOOT)

Place: Aizawl, Mizoram

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Chapter 1

Introduction – Representation of Women in America Pop Culture

This study examines the representation of women in American Pop Culture in selected texts and their filmic adaptations. The study explores the extent to which a patriarchal society like America influences the way women are represented in popular culture. The representation of women in selected texts and their adaptations into films is examined and discussed critically in this study taking into consideration the hegemonic dominance of male views in a fundamentally patriarchal society like that of America.

The term “Popular Culture” was first conceived around the nineteenth century to denote the popular culture that was associated with the lower classes as opposed to the “official culture” of the upper classes. According to John Storey in his work *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: An Introduction*: “...popular culture is always defined, implicitly or explicitly, in contrast to other conceptual categories: folk culture, mass culture, dominant culture, working-class culture, etc. A full definition must always take this into account.” (1) Lane Crothers debates why and when culture is considered to be popular:

What does it mean to say that culture is “popular”? Is it simply a matter that something, some artifact, whether a movie or a fashion style or a sport, is enjoyed broadly in some community and so is “popular”? Or, alternatively, should popular be considered akin to “folk” such that popular culture is an expression of an authentic, if untrained, traditional art or music or craft form? Might it be a corrupted, diminished form of “high” culture, where high culture is what critic Matthew Arnold referred to as “the best that was thought and said,” whereas popular culture is recognized as commercial pap, produced only for profit at an industrial scale? (28)

Popular Culture, also more widely known as Pop Culture, may also refer to various cultural communication channels from an extensive array of print-based media, advertising, movies, music, novels, radio, television, and even comics. At the turn of the twentieth century “high art” was the domain of the affluent and the educated in society which subsequently led to the inception of “low art” (also known as popular art) for the interest of the lower classes. However, this class stratification became less discerned in the 1950’s when pop culture gained more popularity across the different societal divides. By the 1960’s, artists began merging pop culture with forms like

advertisements, comics, imagery, and even movies that were adapted from high art. Today pop culture also includes digital media, embracing different forms of social platforms as means of expression and communication.

Before the twentieth century, the United States of America was considered to be a cultural backwater. During this time the “American Dream” was the USA’s greatest cultural selling point to the world – an unlimited inspiration and motivation for millions of people who aspired for a better life. It was around the time of the First World War that America first began to export its culture abroad through the artistic mediums such as films and music. Home-grown distinctive cultural icons such as Charlie Chaplin, “Western” films, ragtime and jazz, became familiar to the outside world. It was not until after the Second World War with the growth of the consumer economy and the growing popularity of the “American Lifestyle” in the 1950’s, American popular culture went global, having a tremendous impact on the rest of the world. Elizabeth Wurtzel has defined the American influence on Pop Culture in her work *The Pop Culture Clause* (2010) where she states:

We dream big, we think large, we create grandeur. We invented Hollywood, rock n’ roll, blue jeans, the gold rush, cable TV with thousands of channels, a military that is larger than those of the next fifteen combined, the shopping mall, and a store that sells nothing but socks. We invented Elvis and teen idols, we invented Disneyland and the roller coaster, we didn’t invent the wheel but we did come up with the model T, and we didn’t invent the wing but we did invent the airplane... (1)

America’s cultural influence through films has been particularly widespread. When this new medium for entertainment gain popularity especially after the First World War, America was the country that led the world in this visual form of art. This trend is explained in *Popular Culture in American History*:

But the real watershed event in the creation of a new visual culture was the advent of a new mass medium: film. A neurological quirk of the human brain – the illusion of motion when a series of pictures are displayed in rapid motion – became the basis for a series of converging, technological, commercial, and artistic trends that not only remade the map of popular culture but became central to American identity as a whole (indeed, movies have been our

signature national export ever since the First World War, when they first captured the international market). (Cullen 117)

Hollywood the home of the American film industry has become a mecca for filmgoers around the world. Motion pictures may not have been invented in America, but modern movies were perfected there. The dominance of American culture in films and other media is so strong that the stereotypes that American films and television sell to their domestic public becomes such that the international audience emulates them in their art and everyday lives and have even identified with them to a large extent. In other words, they have become so familiar that they have become household names in different parts of the world. The global influence of American Pop Culture is so extensive that the representation of women in its media such as films, televisions and advertisements has far reaching affects. In what is largely a male-dominated industry like Hollywood, one of the biggest export of American Pop Culture, issues of stereotyping and marginalizing women in certain roles have been closely examined and critiqued by feminists and cultural theorists alike.

Popular culture correlated with mass media is based on certain forces of consumption, and this foundation of consumption is constructed through the implementation of representation. The concept of representation is a set of processes that signifies or stands for or portrays something else. It can be argued that representations are cultural constructions that are innately engaged with questions of power through the process of selection and organization that consequently is a part of representation. Representation entails enabling a certain awareness to exist while precluding other ways of perceptions. Representation appears to have a political connotation where one is asked to view a person in a certain way. Stuart Hall in his work *Representation, Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* argues that a politic of representation must register the volatile nature of signification and effectuate a variable compliance to accept differences. It can be said that representation examines into the power relations innate in the representation of race and gender, at the same time deconstructing the distinct terms that are related to their heterogeneous binary constructions.

The works selected for this research are four novels and their film adaptations. The novels are *Gone with the Wind* (1936) by Margaret Mitchell, *Breakfast at*

Tiffany's (1958) by Truman Capote, *Sex and the City* (1997) by Candace Bushnell and *The Help* (2009) by Kathryn Stockett. The film adaptations are *Gone with the Wind* (1939), *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (1961), *Sex and the City* (2008), *Sex and the City 2* (2010) and *The Help* (2011).

Gone with the Wind (1936) is a novel by American writer Margaret Mitchell first published in 1936. The story is set in the southern state of Georgia, during the American Civil War and Reconstruction Era. It depicts the struggles of young Scarlett O'Hara, the spoiled daughter of a well-to-do plantation owner, who does all she can to fight her way out of poverty. This historical novel features a Bildungsroman or coming-of-age story, with the title taken from a poem written by Ernest Dowson. The character of Scarlett is a complete contrast to the traditional stereotyped woman. Scarlett is distinct from the general perception of a 'lady' as opposed to the traditional image of a woman imposed by conventional patriarchal ideology. Marriage becomes a means for commercial gains and to ensure her financial stability and security, in the process coldly manipulating the men in her life. Scarlett thrives in a patriarchal society that is doubly against her for being a southerner and a woman. The mid-nineteenth century reflected a sexist patriarchal ideology, where the assumed purpose of a woman in life was to fulfil the duties of being a wife and a mother, submitting to her husband and her family. The story of Scarlett is that of a woman who goes against this expected normative behaviour of a woman in a strictly patriarchal society.

Breakfast at Tiffany's (1958) a novella by Truman Capote and published in 1958 has as its central character Holly Golightly one of Capote's best known characters. The story evolves around Holly Golightly a country girl turned New York cafe society girl. She has no job and makes her living by socializing with wealthy men who shower her with gifts and treats, eventually hoping to marry one of them. Holly is outspoken and likes to shock people with revelations about herself and in the course of a year she slowly reveals herself to the narrator who is fascinated by her lifestyle. This novella by Capote is narrated by an unnamed unemployed writer who forms a close friendship with Holly. He becomes captivated with Holly and her world who leaves her former life in the countryside as Lula Mae Barnes the wife of an elderly animal doctor. The characters of the novella are more sexually suggestive

than the characters that were portrayed in the film. The sexual orientations of Holly Golightly and the unnamed writer (who Holly calls 'Fred' because he reminds her of his brother Fred) are ambiguous. While Holly hints that she is a "dyke," although there is no indication that the narrator is gay, Holly addresses him as "maude" a reference to a male prostitute or a homosexual. "Well I may be rotten to the core, Maude but testify against a friend I will not." (Capote 93) When the novel was adapted into film the characters adhered to a more conventional depiction of gender roles, so that in the film adaptation the relationship between Holly and the narrator is translated into a heterosexual romantic comedy to fit into the ideals of mainstream cinema, whereas in the novella there is no indication that there is a romantic relationship between them. For the film, George Axelrod had to devise a more conventional storyline that adhered to the patriarchal notions of gender relationships, resulting in the two main characters together at the end of the film, which was the standard ending of romantic comedies.

Sex and the City (1997) is a collection of essays by Candace Bushnell based on her and her friends' lifestyles. It was first published in 1997, and re-published in 2001, 2006, and in 2008 as a tenth anniversary movie tie-in edition. The book is an anthology of columns that Bushnell began writing in 1994 for *The New York Observer*. The book was loosely adapted into a long-running HBO television series also called *Sex and the City* (1998–2004) which in turn generated a 2008 film of the same name and a 2010 sequel written under the fictional version of herself, Carrie Bradshaw. The book is based on the author Candace Bushnell's life and her circle of friends, as single women living in New York city. Stories on single women in their thirties and over, living uninhibited lives were an anomaly, rather than the norm. Candace Bushnell in an interview with *The Gaurdian* stated:

When I started writing the column, there wasn't a whole lot of interest in the single woman. It was a cultural reality that no one had spent much time thinking about. And people really felt that if a woman was single in her 30's there was something wrong with her – she must have terrible baggage or a terrible personality. But there have always have been single women, and there certainly have always been single women in the big cities. It just wasn't something that anybody was going to write about. (1)

The Help published in 2009 is a novel by American author Kathryn Stockett. The story is about African Americans working in white households in Jackson, Mississippi, during the early 1960s. The story is told primarily from the first-person perspectives of three women: Aibileen Clark, Minny Jackson, and Eugenia "Skeeter" Phelan. Aibileen is a maid who takes care of children and cleans white people's houses. Minny is Aibileen's friend who frequently tells her employers what she thinks of them, resulting in her having been fired from nineteen jobs. Eugenia "Skeeter" Phelan is the daughter of a white family who owns a cotton farm outside Jackson. The story focuses on her relationship with the two black maids, Aibileen Clark and Minny Jackson, during the Civil Rights Movement in 1963 Jackson, Mississippi. In an attempt to become a legitimate journalist and writer, Skeeter decides to write a book from the point of view of the maids—referred to as "The Help"—exposing the racism they are faced with as they work for white families.

The films that have been selected for the research are films that have been adapted from the chosen texts. *Gone with the Wind* is a 1939 American epic historical romance film, adapted from Margaret Mitchell's 1936 novel of the same name. The film was produced by David O. Selznick of Selznick International Pictures and directed by Victor Fleming. The leading roles are played by Vivien Leigh (Scarlett), Clark Gable (Rhett), Leslie Howard (Ashley), and Olivia de Havilland (Melanie). *Breakfast at Tiffany's* is a 1961 American romantic comedy film directed by Blake Edwards and written by George Axelrod, loosely based on Truman Capote's novella of the same name, starring Audrey Hepburn and George Peppard. *Sex and the City* (advertised as *Sex and the City: The Movie*) is a 2008 American romantic comedy film written and directed by Michael Patrick King as a sequel to the 1998-2004 HBO comedy series of the same name based on the book by Candace Bushnell, about four female friends: Carrie Bradshaw (Sarah Jessica Parker), Samantha Jones (Kim Cattrall), Charlotte York Goldenblatt (Kristin Davis), and Miranda Hobbes (Cynthia Nixon) dealing with their lives as single women in New York City. Despite mixed reviews from critics, calling the film an extended episode of the series, it was a commercial success, grossing over \$415 million worldwide from a \$65 million budget. A sequel to the film, entitled *Sex and the City 2*, was released in 2010 to similar commercial success but even larger critical failure.

It was written, co-produced, and directed by Michael Patrick King. *The Help* is a 2011 American period drama film directed and written by Tate Taylor and adapted from Kathryn Stockett's 2009 novel of the same name. DreamWorks Pictures acquired the screen rights to Stockett's novel in March 2010 and quickly commissioned the film into production with Chris Columbus, Michael Barnathan, and Brunson Green as producers. The film was a critical and commercial success, receiving positive reviews and grossing \$216 million worldwide. *The Help* received four Academy Award nominations including Best Picture, Best Actress for Davis, and Best Supporting Actress for both Chastain and Spencer, with the latter winning the award. The film also won the Screen Actors Guild Award for Outstanding Performance by a Cast in a Motion Picture.

The emergence of the second wave of the feminist movement from the late 1950s onwards paved the way for the analysis and critique of the representation of women in Popular Culture and mass media within a wider context of gender inequality and oppression. According to Dominic Strinati,

Women are either absent, or represented (and we have to remember that popular culture's concern with women is often devoted entirely to their representation, how they look) by stereotypes based upon sexual attractiveness and the performance of domestic labour. In short, women are 'symbolically annihilated' by the media through being absent, condemned or trivialised. (167)

The different tools and mediums of mass media have in effect represented both men and women in conformity with cultural stereotypes expected of them which in turn conform to traditional sex roles. Scarlett O'Hara in *Gone with the Wind* lives in a world plagued with artificial constructs of gender and the price for going against these norms is social ostracization. Holly Golightly escapes the confines of the conventional life of a housewife and moves to the fast paced city of New York to become a call girl in *Breakfast at Tiffany's*. In Kathryn Stockett's *The Help* Skeeter goes against the sexist conventions of the time that dictates domesticity for a woman, and instead chooses to write a book that exposes the racial injustices in the Southern part of the United States. Skeeter's sense of oppression by gender norms makes her more sensitive to racial issues and empowers her to reject her community's

expectations of her. Candace Bushnell's *Sex and the City*, in its themes and dialogue, often attempts to investigate and challenge the traditional, culturally constructed categories of male/masculinity and female/femininity. The characters often prove unwilling to accept the gender-biases and give in to what society expects them to be as women.

The basic concept for feminism arises from the desire to remedy the ills of society's social constructions about women and their role in the general public. There is no one definite set of beliefs or structure that makes up feminist ideals, it is a collection of ideas set to the tone of a common goal, the empowerment and improvement of the quality of life for women. Many feminists discovered and believed that while culture was a powerful arena, it perpetuated and created sexist ideas and representations. Sexism is prejudice, stereotyping, or discrimination, typically against women, on the basis of sex. Feminist struggles with the sexist aspects of mass culture and popular culture (in a contemporary setting this includes new media) are based on this belief. Dominic Strinati in his work *An Introduction to Theories of Popular Culture* (2004) sums up the representation of women in Popular Culture as such:

Cultural representations of women in the mass media, it is argued, support and perpetuate the prevailing sexual division of labour and orthodox conceptions of femininity and masculinity. The 'symbolic annihilation of women' practiced by the mass media confirms that the roles of wife, mother and housewife, etc., are the fate of women in a patriarchal society. Women are socialised into performing those roles by cultural representations which attempt to make them appear to be the natural prerogative of women. (167)

Films can be defined as cultural artifacts that are created by specific cultures. They are a reflection of culture and in the context of Popular Culture they are a powerful medium for entertaining, educating, or indoctrinating. Mulvey in her work *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* (1975) posits that gender power asymmetry is a controlling force in cinema and constructed for the pleasure of the male viewer, which is embedded in patriarchal ideologies and discourses. The "male gaze" becomes dominant and the woman becomes passive under it. This adds an element of "patriarchal" order and Mulvey substantiates that, in mainstream cinema, the male

gaze takes precedence over the female gaze, reflecting an underlying power asymmetry.

For instance, with *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, the novella and the film offer two very different representations of the character of Holly and how she navigates within a world that is organized around gender differences. Whereas the novella presents her as an unconventional, eccentric young woman who subverts the matrix of power that regulates female sexuality and whose identity is performative, fluid, and in a constant state of flux, lending her easily to a post-modern interpretation, the film under the male gaze portrays her by fixing her identity around a centre (of a man). Through representing Holly as an object of the male gaze and within the narrative confines of the classic, hetero-normative romantic comedy, Holly's eventual acceptance of the hegemony of the patriarchal gender hierarchy gains narrational plausibility.

The research intends to study two different mediums of Pop Culture – the novel and film of a primary text keeping in mind that Adaptation Theory has moved away from the dichotomy of film and literature and toward a focus on multidirectional flows across a transmedia model; concentrating less on what has been lost by a text during the process of adaptation, and more on what the text has gained by taking on a new form or variation. Robert Stam says of this in his work *Beyond Fidelity: The Dialogics of Adaptation* (1999),

...a single novelistic text comprises a series of verbal signals that can generate a plethora of possible readings, including even readings of the narratives itself. The literary text is not a closed, but an open structure (or, better, structuration, as the later Barthes would have it) to be reworked by a boundless context. The text feeds on and is fed into an infinitely permutating intertext, which is seen through ever-shifting grids of interpretation. (57)

Theories of Intertextuality have become a central element of adaptation theory, as the adapted text is compared not only with the original, but other adaptations and similar texts in an ongoing dialogical process. When content undergoes adaptation, it is subject to a variety of forces and factors, which are dictated by the nature of the source text, the reason for adapting the text, medium, market, and culture into which it is adapted. For adaptation theorists like Linda Hutcheon, the term “adaptation”

denotes a multi-layered application that she explains by saying “...we experience adaptations (as adaptations) as palimpsests through our memory of other works that resonate through repetition with variation.” (8)

The present research studies and analyses the representation of women in American Pop Culture through the medium of films and the novels from which they are adapted. By studying different texts and films with diverse themes, it attempts to examine and place the stereotyping and marginalizing of women in a pre-dominant male culture taking into account different factors that can influence this perception. This research also explores the assumption that women are represented as cultural stereotypes which serve to reproduce traditional sex roles.

Pop Culture does not merely entail what is popular among a certain demographic. It is reflected and dictated by the political conditions and the social norms and convictions of a nation. The research will therefore analyze the narrative structures of the texts and the films to be studied to see how far the narratives are responsible for the stereotyping of women. This research will attempt to examine and analyze the extent to which the narratives are a reflection of perceived images and notions of femininity and masculinity and the extent of socio-political factors that help to influence these perceptions.

The concept of the “male gaze”, first developed by feminist film critic Laura Mulvey in her 1975 essay entitled “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” will be closely examined to determine the extent of male dominance in constructing cultural gender roles that reflect an underlying power asymmetry in popular culture. The male gaze implies that women in patriarchal society are objectified by men to satisfy their desires, thereby placing women in the context of male desire. The male gaze theory was formulated by Mulvey to address the issue of how in cinema gender power asymmetry is a controlling force and is conceived for the male viewer’s pleasure, in a discourse that is deeply embedded in patriarchal ideologies. Mulvey states: “Women then stands in a patriarchal culture as signifier for the male other, bound by a symbolic order in which man can live out his phantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer of meaning, not maker of meaning.” (834) In essence the male gaze theory suggests that women on screen are objectified by men and are

viewed as passive objects of men's desire. In effect, the gaze becomes a tool for control to conform to patriarchal ideologies.

The following texts and essays have been chosen for review of literature:

Dominic Strinati's *An Introduction to Theories of Popular Culture*, Second Edition, (2004) examines the ways in which popular theories of Popular Culture have tried to understand and evaluate Popular Culture in modern societies. Among the theories and ideas the book introduces are mass culture, the Frankfurt School, and the culture industry, semiology and structuralism, Marxism, feminism, post modernism and cultural populism. Strinati explains how theorists such as Adorno, Barthes, Althusser and Hebdige have grappled with the many forms of popular culture, from Jazz to the Americanization of British popular culture, from Hollywood cinema to popular television series, and from teen magazines to the spy novel.

Andi Zeisler's *Feminism and Pop Culture* (2008) looks at Pop culture as "any cultural product that has a mass audience" (1). Her book critically analyzes female representation in media in American pop culture, citing the work of earlier feminist scholars and gender theorists to establish their relevance to today's cultural studies. She explains her intentions in writing her book stating that, "The subject of this book is feminism and pop culture, and it tackles two sides of the topic: first, how popular culture has inspired, fueled, and furthered the women's movement and feminism; and second, how feminism has been depicted in popular culture. (6) Zeisler citing Berger and Laura Mulvey, acknowledges how the male gaze is largely responsible for how women are represented and perceived in popular culture. Zeisler defines the male gaze as the idea that when one looks at images in art or on screen, one sees them from the perspectives of a man even if one is a woman because those images are constructed to be seen by men. Zeisler then proceeds to do an overview of the intersection of feminism and pop culture beginning in the 1940s.

Linda Hutcheon's *A Theory of Adaptation* (2006) looks at adaptation as a secondary work from the original. She notes that, "When we call a work an adaptation, we openly announce its overt relationship to another work or works." (6). She talks about the intertextuality of adaptations and how they are 'palimpsestic' in nature. The process of adaptation turns into an act of retrieving and appropriating a primary text that aims to give it a new meaning. Through this process of

intertextuality, every earlier adaptation is incorporated into the comprehension of every subsequent adaptation. Adaptation is thought of in terms of product and process making it possible to analyze adaptations beyond fidelity discourse. She argues that adaptation can best be analyzed by asking what, who, why, how, where and when. Hutcheon discusses how important the context of adaptation is in relation to time, place, gender, politics, race, and culture.

Judith Mayne's *The Woman at the Keyhole – Feminism and Women's Cinema* (1990) examines how contemporary women filmmakers in North America, Europe, and Australia have tried to reinvent cinema as a narrative and visual form. She acknowledges the ambiguity of the phrase "women's cinema" and has redefined and challenged some of the most basic and fundamental links between cinema and patriarchy. The book, divided into three parts, focuses on important and difficult areas of feminist film theory and criticism where the analysis of women's film is concerned.

Robert Stam's essay "Beyond Fidelity," included in the James Naremore 1999 anthology *Film Adaptation*, calls for a larger paradigm shift in which authors like Naremore, Dudley Andrews, Kamilla Elliot, Deborah Cartmell, Imelda Whelehan, Thomas Leitch, Jack Boozer, Christine Geraghty, Alessandra Raengo, and Linda Hutcheon move from a binary novel-film fidelity approach to a more open transtextual approach. Any work of literature has dozens of readings that will produce different notions of its essence. So a film adaptation is not just a single linear translation of a single original novel, but is part of a larger cycle of interconnected works that is constantly growing.

Laura Mulvey in her seminal work *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* (1975) incorporates the Freudian idea of phallocentrism. Using Freud's thoughts, Mulvey insists on the idea that the images, characters, plots, and stories, and dialogues in films are inadvertently built on the ideals of patriarchies, both within and beyond sexual contexts. It is under the construction of patriarchy that Mulvey argues that women in film are tied to desire and that female characters are meant merely for visual and erotic impact. The female actor is never meant to represent a character that directly affects the outcome of a plot or keep the story line going, but

is inserted into the film as a way of supporting the male role and becomes the object of sexual gratification.

Jennifer Hammett's *The Ideological Impediment: Feminism and Film Theory* (1997) looks at the ideological impediment of epistemology and feminism. Beginning with the first premise of semiology, Johnston reminded feminists that cinematic images are representations. Feminists were quick to embrace the concept of ideology. But the inevitable failure of feminist film scholars to theorize an escape from ideology has no consequences for the practice of feminist film criticism. Thus, there is no consequence for feminism. So in order to avoid falsification effects of representation, Hammett maintains that a 'critical distance' from personal constructed assumptions, commitments, and beliefs is needed.

Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* argues that the American women of her time (1950's and 1960's) were subjected to a society that was oppressive and sexist. In her work she puts forth the argument that women's limited roles which conform to the traditional feminine roles ascribed to them such as being mothers and wives, resulted in a widespread identity and mental health crisis, leaving women with a sense of dissatisfaction and restlessness in their lives. She attributes this crisis to a "problem that has no name." (9) She further states, "Women who suffer this problem have lived their whole lives in the pursuit of feminine fulfilment." (16) This "feminine fulfilment" is the struggle for women against the pressure to conform to societal acceptance and definitions of femininity imposed upon them. The 'feminine mystique' is explained as the expectations and limitations that society places on women in the 1950's and 1960's in suburban America. By this definition women were defined by their sex assigned roles as housewives and mothers with the sole aim being to devote themselves to their families. The book by examining the systemic sexism in American culture during the 1950's and 1960's, became one of the underlying inspiration for the second wave of the feminist movement which fought further for equal rights of women.

Judith Butler's work *Gender Trouble* first published in 1990 argues that gender is a social construct that imposes certain traits onto people according to their assigned sex. She differentiates biological sex which is based on the categories of male, female, and intersex that are rooted in the reproductive organs and

chromosomes, while gender refers to constructed categories of man and woman and the characteristics and behaviours associated with each category. She further postulates that some behaviour can be described as gender-normative while others are gender non-conforming. This suggests that gender identity is fluid and is based on performativity. Butler explains, "Gender is the repeated stylization of the Body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance of a natural sort of being." (45) Butler reiterates Simone de Beauvoir to affirm her views on gender constructs by stating: "If there is something right in Beauvoir's claim that one is not born, but rather becomes a woman, it follows that woman itself is a term in process, a becoming, a constructing that cannot rightfully be said to originate or to end." (45) Butler in expounding her theory also examines other philosophers such as Luce Irigaray, Claude Levi-Strauss, Joan Riviere, Sigmund Freud, Jacques Lacan, Julia Kristeva, and Michel Foucault, in constructing a feminism that is grounded in performativity.

Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949) is believed to have launched the second wave of feminism which claimed that women have always been subordinated to men throughout history and across cultural boundaries, relegated to the role of the "other," or that which is adjectival to the substantial subjectivity and existential activity of men. While man has been able to transcend and exert control over his surroundings, constantly expanding the realm of his intellectual and physical victories, women have remained trapped in "immanence," remaining enslaved within the constraints of their reproductive and maternal roles. This subordination is highlighted in the book, which also shows in a distinctive existentialist manner how historical trends that reflected the interests of men really established the "essence" of women on an economic, social, political, and religious level.

Susan J. Douglas, a feminist media studies scholar at the University of Michigan, in her work *The Rise of Enlightened Sexism – How Pop Culture took Us from Girl Power to Girls Gone Wild* (2010) addresses the issue of the reality of women's inequality, even when the media chooses to portray 'strong' women, particularly on television and in films. She argues that in some cases these portrayals of women seem to be a detriment to the work of the feminist movement of the seventies and early eighties. Douglas states that feminism that is depicted by the

media is best practiced by younger, thin women who embrace ‘girl power’ while dressing provocatively. She examines how the media breaks down the inability of women to form a bonding despite attaining this girl power; being in constant competition with one another. She states, “Power also comes from judging, dissing, and competing with other girls, especially over guys.” (7)

In view of the above discussion, the study is divided into five chapters and organised in the following manner:

Chapter 1: Introduction – Representation of Women in American Pop Culture

This chapter introduces the concept of Pop Culture and situates the American pop culture scene. It examines how American Pop Culture has influenced the world and the different forms of media that have helped to perpetuate its global image. The chapter delves into the study of representation of women in American pop culture through the mediums of selected films and the novels from which the films were adapted. An introduction to the primary texts, *Gone with the Wind* (1936) by Margaret Mitchell, *Breakfast at Tiffany’s* (1958) by Truman Capote, *Sex and the City* (1997) by Candace Bushnell, and *The Help* (2009) by Kathryn Stockett, as well as the film adaptations of the primary texts, *Gone with the Wind* (1939), *Breakfast at Tiffany’s* (1961), *Sex and the City* (2008), *Sex and the City 2* (2010), and *The Help* (2011), is briefly given in this chapter. This chapter also introduces the theoretical frameworks on which the research is based on, providing an outlook on how the various theories have been applied in the analysis of the primary texts. A review of literature on the works that are relevant to the study is also given.

Chapter 2: Concept of the Gaze in Pop Culture

This chapter explores the concept of the Male Gaze and its significance in Pop Culture. The concept of the gaze has a major influence on popular culture and feminist theory. The ‘gaze’ can be described as an awareness of being seen and interpreted by others as such, and this results in adapting one’s actions due to this awareness. This chapter closely studies the psychoanalytic frameworks upon which Laura Mulvey has based her work on the male gaze. The works of Jean Paul Satre, Jacques Lacan and Michel Foucault have been examined in their contribution towards the formation of Laura Mulvey’s gaze theory. It examines and focuses on stereotyped and marginalized feminine roles and behaviours that are perpetuated and

generated by the male gaze. In doing so it also examines the conditions under which women challenge the male gaze and the expected social roles of a woman in a patriarchal culture like America.

Chapter 3: Representation of Women in Fiction

This chapter analyses the selected fictional works for the research and examines the narratives of the texts, focusing primarily on the representations of women. It studies the factors and conditions that generate the identity of women in the texts. This chapter also delves into the feminist movement and its impact on the representation of women in a patriarchal society like that of America. The extent to which men are held responsible for constructing gender roles and whether women themselves are responsible for the way they are perceived and represented in society is closely examined in this chapter. It also examines if the representation of women in novels portray the reality of women's lives or a fantasy world that is perpetuated by Pop Culture in the American context. This chapter examines whether the representation of women are subjected to stereotypical roles within the confines of a patriarchal society.

Chapter 4: Representation of Women in Films

This chapter focuses on the adaptation of the selected texts into films. It examines the extent of the adaptation of the texts considering such factors as the fidelity or infidelity of the films to the primary texts. It studies the intertextuality and the palimpsestic nature of the adaptations. It explores issues of male dominance and male point of view in the Hollywood film industry that have conditioned the way women are represented on screen. Laura Mulvey's theory of the male gaze and its influence in the representation of women in films is closely examined. The influence of the male gaze in the films and issues of gender bias that may occur in the film adaptations are closely explored. This chapter recognizes the existence of a disciplinary conflict between literature and films which informs adaptation theory. The chapter examines how adaptation theory has now focused more on what new form the adaptation has gained rather than what the text has lost through the process of adaptation. The disparity between the representation of men and women in a traditionally gender-biased industry is analyzed, with the focus on whether representation of women in films are stereotypically gender-assigned roles that are

constructed under the influence of a patriarchal society and whether women have limited roles that gain importance and meaning only in relation to others.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

This concluding chapter sums up the salient features that have been studied and explored in the previous chapters. Representation of women in a fundamentally patriarchal society like that of America, is affected by male-dominated beliefs and ideals. Although the feminist movements which formally began in 1948 at the Seneca Falls Convention in New York, paved the way for women's emancipation and gave them greater freedom of expression, patriarchal ideology still forms the way women are perceived and represented. Women's perception of themselves also stems from this conventional and traditional male-oriented ideology. To analyze women's representation in American popular culture the study explores two different mediums, namely written texts (fiction) and their filmic adaptations. The study explores different theoretical approaches in order to critically examine not only how women are represented but also to comprehend the decisive factors that are responsible for these representations. Feminist theorists like Laura Mulvey gives the explanation that in a visual culture the controlling male gaze determines how women are viewed. This chapter attempts to give a comprehensive closing argument of what has been examined in the study, arriving at the conclusion that women's representation is subjected to power distribution and conventional patriarchal norms in society. However, the study also acknowledges that there has been a notable paradigm shift in the representation of women breaking away from traditional identifications of women under a patriarchal social structure. In this state representation of women is constantly in a state of flux.

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Chapter 2

Concept of the Gaze

This chapter explores the concept of the Gaze and its significance in Pop Culture. It studies how the psychoanalytic framework of Jean Paul Satre (1958-2003), Jacques Lacan (1901-1981) and Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) influenced Laura Mulvey's concept of the male gaze. The chapter examines how stereotyped and marginalized feminine roles and behaviours are perpetuated and generated by the male gaze. It also focuses on how the male gaze affects the representation of women with reference to American pop culture.

A concept that has a predominant influence on popular culture and feminist theory is "the gaze" which can be described as an awareness of being seen and interpreted by others as such, and consequently adapting one's actions or conducts due to this awareness. The presence or awareness of the gaze has been largely responsible for how one is perceived by others and how one perceives oneself. The study of the gaze and its significance has been done through diverse cultural mediums over the last few decades, which have included different aspects of media, fine arts, and graphic or visual literature.

To what extent has the concept of the gaze entered popular culture? What is its significance and influence in today's world and the extent to which we define ourselves by the gaze which is imposed on us by society at large. The roles that we take and play out in society is determined to a great extent by the effect of the gaze. No doubt, the fact that one lives in a world that is dominated by a visual culture has contributed to the prominence of the gaze and its power distribution.

The basic foundation of the concept of the gaze can be said to have its roots from two twentieth century French thinkers, Jean Paul Sartre and Jacques Lacan. Sartre in his work *What is Subjectivity?* had raised the concept of subjectivity where one is the subject of another's consciousness. This is illustrated by a scene where one comes across a mannequin and for a fleeting moment is led to believe that it is another person. Sartre took specific interest in how there is a change in the person's consciousness the moment there is the awareness that one might not be alone and is observed by others. According to Sartre subjectivity is awareness to our social environment and this shapes and defines who one is:

Subjectivity is to live your own being, and to live what you are in a society – because we know no other state of man, he is precisely a social being, a social

being who, at the same time, lives the whole of society from his own point of view. I think that any individual, or any group, or any ensemble, is an incarnation of the total society, since they have to live what they are. Moreover, it is only because we can conceive the dialectical play of an enveloping totalisation – that is, a condensing totalisation, which I call incarnation – that each individual is, in a certain manner, the total representation of her epoch; it is only for this reason that we can conceive a true social dialectic. (Sartre 73)

This means that a person will realise and have an awareness of himself through the society that he lives in. Sartre explains: “It means that everything that makes an individual, all her projections, her acts, and also everything to which she is subject, only reflects – but not in a certain Marxist tradition’s scholastic sense of the word ‘reflect’ – only incarnates, if you prefer, the society itself.” (73)

Jacques Lacan the controversial French psychoanalyst re-interpreted and analysed Sigmund Freud’s concept of the *ego*, and explained this through his concept of the mirror stage. This theoretical work became an important foundation for many film theorists who attempted to explain the cinematic experience that was constituted by the gaze. Lacan first delivered this theory as a talk in 1949 in a paper that was titled “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I function, as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience” found in his collection of works *Ecrits*. The mirror stage refers to the effects of being observed that leads to the change and development of a young child. The theory posits that a child between the age of six and eighteen months, as part of the child’s growth and development begins to differentiate between the self and the other when it begins to recognise its image in the mirror. Prior to the mirror stage, the child from birth in the Real stage, lives in unity with the mother due to the child’s needs. When the child for the first time comes to the realization or an awareness of the image that is reflected in the mirror, it results in the formation of the ego, through the act of objectification. The image that the child sees reflected in the mirror is described by Lacan as the ‘Ideal I’ (76). This ‘Ideal I’ represents the secure and independent form of the self, which the child has not experienced in itself and consequently longs to be that other represented in the mirror. This realization of the presence of the Other, divides the child’s sense of self,

and this denotes the breaking down of the familiar and comforting imaginary state, thereby forcing the child into a world defined by a symbolic order. This symbolic world is indicative of a world that is defined by social roles and gender differences, a world that demarcates subjects and objects. Kaja Silverman a feminist film theorist in her essay “Lost Objects and Mistaken Subjects” describes this moment as such:

The first of these divisions occurs at the mirror stage, where the child arrives at an initial perception of self. That perception is induced through a culturally mediated image which remains irreducibly external, and which consequently implants in the child a sense of otherness at the very moment that identity is glimpsed. At least within the account Lacan offers in ‘The Mirror Stage,’ in which the child catches sight of its actual reflection, that otherness would seem to be compounded by the fact that the child makes its self-discovery through a process of subtraction – through the understanding that it is what is left when a familiar object (e.g., the mother) has been removed. Subjectivity is thus from the very outset dependent upon the recognition of a distance separating self from the other – on an object whose loss is simultaneous with its apprehension. (98)

It is at this moment that, according to Lacan, that the ego takes shape at this instance of alienation and fascination of one’s image in the mirror. The ego is the result of the images that takes form in the mirror. Lacan believed that the ego is formed from an illusion of an image that is whole and the ego’s function is to sustain this appearance of coherence and control. The ego’s function therefore becomes one of “misrecognition,” (80) that is the refusal to accept the breaking up and the sense of estrangement of the self. Anneke Smelik explains Lacan’s conception of the mirror stage in her article “Male Gaze in Cinema”:

The mirror image is an imaginary idealization, because the child projects an ideal image of itself onto the mirror. This ideal self-image leads the child to a first awareness of the ego. The recognition of the self in the mirror image is simultaneously a “mis”-recognition (*meconnaissance*), because the child identifies with the image of itself as an other, that is to say, as a better self than he or she will hope to be in the future. (1)

The effects of being observed and the awareness of the gaze of others upon the self, prompts more self-consciousness which can be unnerving and result in anxiety. To explain this further, how one acts in public, in the presence of others as opposed to how one acts in private when one is alone; will differ to a huge extent. When one assumes that one is not being observed, one may not be concerned about how one looks or behave, and as a result one may feel no inhibitions and do what one want. However, when one is in the presence of others' one may feel more conscious of one's actions, and one's outer appearance becomes based on societal expectations. Thus, we may not reveal one may not reveal one's true self and present one self differently depending on the circumstances – where one is or who one is with. These differences in behaviour may be conceived as products of the gaze. However, awareness of the gaze may not necessarily be a negative factor, as it can help in understanding how to perform successfully in the world. Andy Zeisler in her book *Feminism and Pop Culture* notes that without the effects of the gaze and the images it produces in pop culture, women may not aspire to gain better representations of themselves. "Without pop culture's limited images of women, many actual women in the real world might not have been inspired to fight for more and better representations of themselves." (9)

Another important factor to note is that the gaze can become a tool for control and the means for manipulation. Michel Foucault a prominent French philosopher in his work *Discipline and Punishment, The Birth of the Prison* (1977) discussed the gaze and its role in perpetuating a power-relations in the penal system.

Each individual, in his place, is securely confined to a cell from which he is seen from the front by the supervisor; but the side walls prevent him from coming into contact with his companions. He is seen, but he does not see; he is the object of information, never a subject in communication. The arrangement of his room, opposite the central tower, imposes on him an axial visibility; but the divisions of the ring, those separated cells, imply a lateral invisibility. And this invisibility is a guarantee of order. (200)

In other words, the gaze stands for the result of unceasing observation by others and the consequent lack of privacy. In such states as the prison structure, Foucault believed that inmates were inclined to regulate themselves to avoid

punishment as they presumed that they were always being watched even when they were not. He explains the role of the assumed presence of the gaze:

Hence the major effect of the panopticon: to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power. So to arrange things that the surveillance is permanent in its effects, even if it is discontinuous in its action; that the perfection of power should tend to render its actual exercise unnecessary; that this architectural apparatus should be a machine for creating and sustaining a power relation independent of the person who exercises it; in short, that the inmates should be caught up in a power situation of which they are themselves the bearer. (Foucault 201)

Foucault further explains this by saying, “for what matters is that he knows himself to be observed; too much, because he has no need in fact of being so.” (201) Just the awareness of being watched has the effect of the inmates being conscious of their actions and the repercussions of their actions at all times even when they are not being watched. The conscious awareness of the gaze of the custodian, whether present or not, becomes a means of controlling the prison inmates. If one further takes into consideration Foucault’s theory and its influence on power relations, it can be concluded that those who have control of the gaze or the ones who are watching, have power and control over those who are at the receiving end of the gaze. Power is exercised with an objective and that objective is control. Foucault in his work *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction* explains: “Power relations are both intentional and non-subjective. If in fact they are intelligible, this is not because they are the effect of another instance that “explains” them, but rather because they are imbued, through and through, with calculation: there is no power that is exercised without a series of aims and objectives.” (95) In the feminist context this becomes relevant and accounts for power distribution among the genders. Lisa DeTora in her seminal work “‘Life Finds a Way’: Monstrous Maternities and The Quantum Gaze In Jurassic Park And The Thirteenth Warrior” puts it this way, “The distinction between who – or what – is doing the looking and who – or what – is being observed is an important binary,” (5) in who commands the authority and power.

When examining Foucault's theory of the controlling power of the gaze in the penal system, one can perceive the regulatory effects that the gaze has on today's modern world. The oppressive effect of the gaze that becomes an invasion of privacy and personal freedom is illustrated for instance, in George Orwell's dystopian novel *1984* where its citizens are controlled and kept in line by the "party," through constant surveillance using cameras, hidden microphones and two-way tele screens. The idea of a pervasive and a constantly controlling gaze seems to be captured aptly by the phrase "Big brother is watching you," (3) a phrase that George Orwell coined in his novel *1984*. This fictional world of George Orwell where people are prisoners of the watchful eyes of "Big brother" is fast becoming a reality now due to modern technological advances in a digital world, that has ensured being connected to the world at all times with one's movements monitored digitally.

When discussing power relationships, Michel Foucault states that, "Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything but because it comes from everywhere." (17) Furthermore, the controlling power of the gaze leads to a discourse which Foucault explains, "...we must not imagine a world of discourse divided between accepted discourse and excluded discourse, or between the dominant discourse and the dominated one; but as a multiplicity of discursive elements that can come into play in various strategies." (20) This statement makes the assumption that when women resist being dominated by the controlling male gaze, it becomes a struggle against a form of power that makes the subject of the gaze perceive themselves in a limited and limiting way. This form of power translates to patriarchy by feminists and the resistance that arises through their discourse is against this patriarchal power. In Foucault's words: "Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power." (95)

Although today's world may not be as restrictive and invasive as George Orwell's dystopian world, there is undoubtedly a comprehensive effect of the gaze in modern society that is responsible for shaping the way one identifies and projects oneself to the world. The awareness of others' gaze, may lead one to project oneself in a manner that conforms to the expectation of others. For instance, the images and personas that are uploaded on social media may be altered to please and gain the

most number of viewers. From a feminist perspective, “the disciplining effect of the panoptic gaze is internalized by women in their relation to their own body.” (Smelik 2) Women are governed by the male gaze and consequently this acts as a mirror in which they see reflections of themselves and form their ideal images.

The gaze and its self-regulating effects has had an extensive influence on contemporary feminist theory. Laura Mulvey, a feminist film theorist was one of the first and one of the most influential feminist to develop the concept of the gaze and its oppressive effects on women. In her seminal work “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” (1975) Mulvey questioned and examined the gender power asymmetry, a dominating concept that is present in the visual arts, especially cinema. The difference in gender power and subsequently the discrimination between the sexes was attributed to the existence of the male gaze. According to Andi Zeisler, in her book *Feminism and Pop Culture*, “The Male Gaze affects how women view pop culture and how we view ourselves.” (7) Zeisler further elucidates the concept of the male gaze and its affect stating:

What is the male gaze? Put simply, it’s the idea that when we look at images in art on screen, we’re seeing them as a man might – even if we are women – because those images are constructed to be seen by men. John Berger’s 1972 fine-art monograph *Ways of Seeing* didn’t coin the phrase, but it did describe the gendered nature of looking this way: “Men act and women appear. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of women to themselves. The surveyor of women in herself is male: the surveyed female. Thus she turns herself into an object – and most particularly an object of vision: a sight. (7)

In other words, the gaze becomes a means of control and a tool for conforming to patriarchal ideologies. The male gaze theory assumes that the viewer is a man and even when the viewer is a woman, she views not as a woman but does so through the eyes of the man. Women are viewed as objects, and this objectification of women lies in identifying women as a commodity for the gratification of the male viewer. In most cases women are also conditioned to act and abide by this gaze. The way

women are perceived not only by men but by themselves is significantly influenced by the male gaze.

Mulvey's explanation of the male gaze was based on Freudian psychoanalysis. She gave her reasoning for her work being grounded in psychoanalysis, "Psychoanalytic theory is thus appropriate here as a political weapon, demonstrating the way the unconscious of patriarchal society has structured film form." (833) Mulvey further explains how this psychoanalytic theory is applied in interpreting the male gaze:

Woman then stands in patriarchal culture as signifier for the male other, bound by a symbolic order in which man can live out his phantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer of meaning, not maker of meaning. (834)

The male gaze which suggests the male as a dominant power especially in the media and visual arts, shapes how women are viewed. Under the male gaze the woman is passive and this contributes to the patriarchal factor. Mulvey's argument is that the male gaze supersedes the female gaze, resulting in an underlying imbalance of power. Looking into American culture and society, one can posit this asymmetry in the balance of gender power as a result of patriarchy, traditionally embedded in their systems. In a patriarchal society like that of America, men dictate the history and standard of women. The subjugation of women through the objectification of women is a theme that is rampant throughout the history of western culture where patriarchal ideology is dominant. Examining the American society in *Popular Culture in American History*, it states: "Moreover, while the United States was born amid assertions that all men are created equal, it has always been true, to paraphrase George Orwell, that some men have been more equal than others and that most men have been more equal than most women." (8)

The male gaze puts forward the assumption that women are objectified by others and women are aware of this to the point that this leads to their self-definition and identification. In the film *Breakfast at Tiffany's* the opening scene constructs Holly as the main spectacle of the film and the main object of the gaze. As Holly steps out of the taxi, wearing a glamorous black evening gown, a diamond necklace and a matching tiara, she immediately becomes the centre of attention amidst the

sombre background. Susan J. Douglas observes this objectification of women in the media especially on the big screen:

In standard Hollywood movies, men act – they solve crimes, engage in sword fights, right social injustice, and swing from vines – while women are on screen to be looked at. Constantly positioned on staircase, stages, rugs, beds, beaches, even tables, their bodies exposed while men are covered by sheets, robes, boxer shorts or jungle gear, women are primarily physical specimens to be surveyed intently by the camera, the male characters in the film, and, of course, the audience. Print ads in particular reinforce this, with endless images of pouty-lipped, beautiful women looking at themselves in the mirror, being gazed at adoringly by men and by other women conveyed with envy. Women learn to turn themselves into objects to be scrutinized; they learn they must continually watch themselves being watched by others, whether they're walking on the beach, drinking a beer, entering a restaurant, or rocking a baby. (16)

The principles of feminism attempts to enforce a paradigm shift from the concepts of patriarchy by analysing and examining the power structures that lie in patriarchal societies and thereby changing the distribution of power where men rule and enjoy privileges that are not accessible to women. In a predominantly patriarchal society like the United States of America, women's existence depends within a discourse dictated by men. Historically, in such patriarchal societies men play the dominant role and women bear the more submissive roles. Consequently the dominant and controlling gaze belongs to the male in a patriarchal society, and Judith Butler gives an explanation of this: "The very notion of "patriarchy" has threatened to becoming a universalizing concept that overrides or reduces distinct articulations of gender asymmetry in different cultural contexts." (Butler 48)

The male gaze suggests a shift in power, with women reduced to spectacles. "The representation of 'Woman' as a spectacle to be looked at pervades visual culture. In such representations, 'Woman' is defined solely in terms of sexuality, as an object of desire, in relation to, or as a foil for, 'Man'." (Chaudhuri 2) Yet a film like *Sex and the City* is conspicuous in opposing the narratives put forward by a patriarchal society. Characters like Samantha Jones resists the narratives of a

dominant male gaze that dictates how women should conform to patriarchal ideologies. She is single, independent, with a voracious appetite for sex like that of a man.

The male gaze theory having been around for nearly half a century, has affected women in nearly every aspect of pop culture from the entertainment industry to social media. This has resulted in a growing stress on looks and appearances, which in turn insinuates that women to be relevant in today's society must present themselves in such a manner that they utilize their looks to the utmost and appear in a manner dictated by the dominant male gaze. However, by doing so, patriarchal behaviours are thus encouraged inadvertently by the very women who resist patriarchal values and dominance in their lives. Mulvey explains this behaviour: "Woman then stands in patriarchal culture as signifier for the male other, bound by a symbolic order in which man can live out his phantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer of meaning, not maker of meaning." (834) Whether the gaze belongs to the male or the female, Susan J. Douglas in her book *Where the Girls Are* says: "Women learn to turn themselves into objects to be scrutinized; they learn they must continually watch themselves being watched by others, whether they're walking on the beach, drinking a beer, entering a restaurant, or rocking a baby." (17)

As a feminist film theorist Laura Mulvey discussed the representation of women in films with special reference to Hollywood film industry. She explained that the audience or the spectators of a film are voyeurs or the spectators who hold the pleasure in looking at the people (the objects) on the screen. Being the object of the male gaze, a woman is viewed as the pleasurable object of the man. According to Mulvey, the woman as the object of the male gaze is described by the term "to-be-looked-at-ness," (837) being at the receiving end of the gaze. The male gaze falls into three categories when it comes to viewership in films. As the camera records the film, this is the first gaze, which is that of the filmmaker. The second gaze is that of spectator watching the film on the screen, while the third gaze lies within the film with the actors/actresses looking at each other. Mulvey was of the opinion that in all these gazes the woman is the object of the gaze and the man is the bearer of the gaze. This male gaze occurs in a patriarchal society with the male gaze being linked with

the patriarchal ideology. Women in this narrative become no more than an object of sexual pleasure to be dominated under the controlling male gaze. In *Breakfast at Tiffany's* the relationship of Holly and Paul establishes Holly as the object of the gaze and Paul as the beholder of the gaze. The narration assumes his point of view as the voyeur and Holly as the spectacle, satisfying Mulvey's argument that: "The man controls the film phantasy and also emerges as the representative of power in a further sense: as the bearer of the look of the spectator, transferring it behind the screen to neutralize the extra-diegetic tendencies represented by woman as spectacle." (838) When Scarlett O' Hara is first introduced in *Gone with the Wind*, though there is no indication that the narrator is either male or female, this first representation of Scarlett reads as the product of a male-dominated gaze. Under the male gaze her appearance is scrutinized and made to conform to male ideals even though she is not described as a conventional beauty.

Scarlett O'Hara was not beautiful, but men seldom realized it when caught by her charm as the Tarleton twins were. In her face were too sharply blended the delicate features of her mother, a Coast aristocrat of French descent, and the heavy ones of her florid Irish father. But it was an arresting face, pointed of chin, square of jaw. Her eyes were pale green without a touch of hazel, starred with bristly black lashes and slightly tilted at the ends. Above them, her thick black brows slanted upward, cutting a startling oblique line in her magnolia-white skin—that skin so prized by Southern women and so carefully guarded with bonnets, veils and mittens against hot Georgia suns. (Mitchell 7)

For the film adaptation of *Gone with the Wind*, the film's poster with Scarlett in the arms of Rhett Butler is very seductive; her chest and neck exposed to his dominant gaze corresponds to the traditional perspective on female spectacle, with women being offered for the enjoyment and "to-be-looked-at-ness" (837) of men.

John Berger defines these roles assigned by the male gaze as:

Men act and women appear. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of women to themselves. The surveyor of woman in herself is male: the surveyed is female. Thus, she turns herself into an object of vision: a sight. (47).

To explain this further, Laura Mulvey in “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” presented two aspects of visual pleasure, which are namely scopophilia and exhibitionism, which are connected to the act of looking and being looked at. She explains this further by giving the illustration of a darkened auditorium where the spectator that views the screens promotes a voyeuristic situation where the male spectator identifies with the male protagonist on the screen. When Mulvey wrote this essay in the 1970’s, she contended that the gaze was heterosexual and male, with the male being the active onlooker and the female holding the position of the passive role as she is being looked upon. The male spectator or onlooker holds the power and is in control of the gaze as he identifies with the male protagonist and in the process controls the fantasies of the film. The woman becomes the object of the gaze controlled by the male projection of his desires and fantasies. Mulvey rationalises:

In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female figure which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be looked-at-ness*. Women displayed as sexual object is the leit-motif of erotic spectacle: from pin-ups to strip-tease, from Ziegfeld to Busby Berkeley, she holds the look, plays to and signifies the male desire. (837)

In a culture that is largely patriarchal the innumerable discourses that may arise and interact with one another on any pop culture platform like the media for example, are structured through gender lines giving precedence to the male discourse. This male discourse is defined within the norms of a patriarchal order: “Patriarchy defines the personal, physical and institutional power that men exert over women.” (Coppock 18)

The male gaze projecting its fantasies on the female figure is dependent on the visual image of the female, which sets a certain code that women are expected to abide by. A certain standard of beauty expectation is set on women as a result. Naomi Wolf in her book *The Beauty Myth* emphasizes how the accepted norms of beauty that are set are done by men: “The beauty myth is not about women at all. It is

about men's institutions and institutional power." (13) In other words the male gaze like Foucault's controlling metaphor of the panopticon, summons a continual body monitoring of the women. This monitoring becomes a means of control in a patriarchal order where women take on the subservient roles to that of the male.

The role and effect of the gaze in the media is undoubtedly significant. In today's world the various medias mirror the social environment, especially how gender role models are represented and promulgated and this has an enduring impact on the construction of identity. Teresa de Lauretis in her work "Oedipus Interruptus" recognizes the social implications of identification in films:

The fact that films, as the saying goes, speaks to each one and to all, that they address spectators both individually and as members of a social group, a given culture, age, or country, implies that certain patterns or possibilities of identification for each and all spectators built into the film. This is undoubtedly one of the functions of genres, and their historical development throughout the century attests to the need for cinema to sustain and provide new modes of spectator identification in keeping with social changes. Because films address spectators as social subjects, then, the modalities of identification bear directly on the process of spectatorship, that is to say, the ways in which the subjectivity of the spectator is engaged in the process of viewing, understanding (making sense of), or even *seeing* the film. (85)

Social media and in particular media systems like televisions and films are generally considered to function as social mirrors. In truth these forms of media often manipulate social reality and continually reflect the traditional and stereotypical gender constructions within a patriarchal narrative. These traditional gender images that are a construction of the male gaze also act as ideological signifiers. Many films and television shows that claim to depict real life separates true social conditions from the film's reality that is meant to entertain specific sets of audiences. The representation of gender roles conform to a patriarchal ideology and this results in images of women in traditionally accepted stereotyped roles. Mainstream cinema does not propagate images of emancipated women, breaking free from patriarchal subjugations, but rather the contrary with women being the subordinate recipients of the male gaze. Films that are produced in Hollywood expressly still disseminate

patriarchally driven images of women that are controlled by the male gaze despite the fact that feminist convictions and beliefs have been part of American society for decades now. Mulvey's gaze theory consolidated the concept that the images of women in films particularly those films that came out of Hollywood still adhere to the traditional patriarchal stereotypes. According to Mulvey men control the images of the characters on the screen:

The man controls the film phantasy and also emerges as the representative of power in a further sense: as the bearer of the look of the spectator, transferring it behind the scene to neutralize the extra-diegetic tendencies represented by woman as spectacle. This is made possible through the processes set in motion by structuring the film around a main controlling figure with whom the spectator can identify. (838)

The second wave of the feminist movement challenged the dominant theoretical representations of femininity and the detrimental images of women as objects of the male gaze in popular culture. Feminists have criticized and protested the image of women portrayed in films and other visual media, where the roles of women are reduced to stereotypical images of women shaped by patriarchal ideology, such as the image of woman as the damsel in distress, the housewife or the whore. These traditionally feminine images perpetuated by a patriarchal order, empowered men to dominate and oppress women, maintaining the patriarchal principles. The protests against negative depiction of women has resulted in feminists film theorists proclaiming that to liberate women it is important to continually declare the struggle against the representation of women formed by patriarchal ideologies. This dilemma of the debilitating image of women, lies in the controlling and restrictive relationship between idealized patriarchal dictated images of women and the internalization and identification of these images by female consumers/spectators.

Films in particular, not only provide entertainment but are a means of expressing dominant ideological beliefs of a given culture. Since the Hollywood film industry imbues the patriarchal ideology, it is responsible for portraying women in traditional, stereotypical images. Laura Mulvey's gaze theory assumes that the controlling gaze is male which forms and perpetuates a patriarchal discourse that

strengthens stereotypes about feminine behaviour and appearances. As a consequence, in a patriarchal society the numerous discourses that are woven in a particular film text are formulated along gender norms that prioritize the patriarchal discourse. In a culture and society like that of America, the predominant ideology remains the patriarchal ideology, which upholds male dominance through the subjugation of women. The identity of the female character is shaped by the hegemonic male gaze, in line with the patriarchy. Shohini Chaudhury in her book *Feminist Film Theorists* discusses how one of the pioneers of British feminist film theory, Claire Johnston alludes to the patriarchy shaping the way women see themselves as men want to see them and how the patriarchy rationalizes the oppression of women:

Johnston moreover queried the sociological film critics' demand for 'positive' or 'true' images of women. Is this a demand for images of woman as they 'really' are or how we would wish them to be? It also assumes that there is an 'essence' of women that has failed to make it onto the screen due to patriarchal ideology and that this would be rectified if women were allowed to represent themselves realistically. As we have seen with de Beauvoir and Friedan, patriarchy itself has long promoted the idea of a feminine essence, which has been used to rationalize women's oppression and prevent them from changing their situation. (23)

Under patriarchal assumptions femininity is formulated in the context that women are subordinated to men. Controlled by the male gaze, the image of women and the conceived notions of femininity under a hegemonic masculinity is promulgated in the mass media. Subsequently the means of mass media are mostly controlled, financed, and owned by men in a patriarchal society. For instance, though the plot of *Sex and the City* is primarily a strong female-oriented narrative that follows independent, contemporary women as they make their way through the hectic urban jungle of Manhattan, the television and film adaptations though arguably aimed at a predominantly female audience, constructed under the male gaze appear to appeal more to patriarchal ideologies and sensibilities in a number of ways, such as the way the patriarchal perspective heavily shapes the idea of marriage. With the exception of Samantha the three main female characters ultimately marry their love interests.

Furthermore, the concept of womanhood influenced by the male gaze is always interpreted in terms of submission, passiveness, sacrifice, and nurturing as opposed to men whose identity and manhood lies in the opposite terms to those of women. Terms like aggression, authority, domination, and power are ascribed as more masculine and not considered to be feminine characteristics in general. As the definitions of femininity compared to the definitions of masculinity are attributed with more passive traits, there is often a misconceived presumption that femininity is inferior and weaker to masculinity.

The operation of the male gaze has further ensured a double standard in morality that creates a dichotomy of female sexuality into the image of the virgin or mother figure and on the other spectrum the image of the whore or the fallen woman.

The main idea is that men and/or societies divide women into two binary types: virgins and whores. The former type encompasses characters who are nurturing, 'good', and who express their sexualities within culturally sanctioned bounds...within marriage or another type of culturally sanctioned monogamous union. Women who fail to embody this ideal are 'whores': they are explicitly or symbolically immoral and dangerously concupiscent. (Gottschall 1)

The moral ideal of the patriarchal dialogue is the virgin relegated to a chaste life of being a dutiful wife and mother. The double standards are applied where men are entitled to promiscuous relationships with the whore or the fallen woman, but at the same time a woman is not allowed the same liberty and a promiscuous woman is looked down upon. While men like Rhett Butler can get away with promiscuous affairs women like Scarlet O'Hara who is openly flirtatious with men, is met with disapproval and condemnation especially by the women.

The male need to control women according to Freudian theory rises out of a fear of castration and a fear of unrestrained female sexuality. Andi Zeisler explains how Mulvey draws her male gaze theory from this Freudian concept:

Mulvey drew on Freudian psychoanalysis. She wrote that the male unconscious, which, according to Freud's theories, is consumed with a fear of castration, deals with that fear by seeking power over women, who represent the castrating figure. Therefore by positioning women as nothing more than

objects to be looked at, sexualized, and made vulnerable, the male unconscious reassures itself that, really, it has nothing to fear from women. (8)

In patriarchal society female sexuality is only condoned within the perimeters of the marriage bed and motherhood, while sexuality outside these contexts is defined as immoral and emasculating. A woman is defined through her nurturing roles in the context of family, and any powerful roles she obtains outside of the family dynamics is seen as a threat and an anomaly. Women who are single by choice or by circumstances are regarded by society as deviants. They are often depicted as strange, odd, and having unfulfilled lives.

An important aspect that falls under the patriarchal concept of femininity lies in its perspective of the female appearance. Physical beauty and its ideals are central to the idealization of female femininity and sexuality in patriarchal ideology. These idealized standard of beauty translates into men's preference of the female appearance. According to Naomi Wolf in her book *The Beauty Myth* patriarchal definitions of feminine beauty imposes on women, unobtainable ideals which hinders and restricts women in their freedom and progress. Wolf furthermore claims that the 'beauty myth' that is imposed by the dominant patriarchal ideology is not in essence about the women in question but in fact is about maintaining the power relations between men and women. "The beauty myth is not about women at all. It is about men's institutions and institutional power." (13) Wolf claims that 'beauty' is a form of currency to ensure that male dominance is perpetuated.

Beauty is a currency system like the gold standard. Like any economy, it is determined by politics, and in the modern age in the West it is the last, best belief system that keeps male dominance intact. In assigning value to women in a vertical hierarchy according to a culturally imposed physical standard, it is an expression of power relations in which women must unnaturally compete for resources that men have appropriated for themselves. (12)

This 'beauty myth' is a quality that women strive for that men want to see in women and men want to possess women who have this quality. Because of this, controlled by the male gaze, women desire to attain this socially constructed norm of beauty, and this can put pressure on women to achieve this ideal beauty. Furthermore, the

ideal of beauty is related to fertility, with beautiful women that meet certain beauty criteria approved by men being the most successful in reproduction. Wolf states that:

The quality called “beauty” objectively and universally exists. Women must want to embody it and men must want to possess women who embody it. This embodiment is an imperative for women and not for men, which situation is necessary and natural because it is biological, sexual, and evolutionary: Strong men battle for beautiful women, and beautiful women are more reproductively successful. Women’s beauty must correlate to their fertility, and since this system is based on sexual selection, it is inevitable and changeless. (12)

The concept of beauty and female physical appearance is influenced by the controlling male gaze which functions to uphold the male hegemony by inscribing patriarchal standards of femininity as a countermove against independent women with different standpoints against the patriarchy. In this light, according to many feminists, the concept of beauty becomes a tool of control for institutional male dominance and power, resulting in the repression of women.

Consequently, there is a strong physical correlation between womanhood and beauty which has distinctly been manifested within the principles of femininity established by the patriarchy. This translates to women being dependent on being looked at, seeking for perfection in their appearances with the intention of being the object of the male gaze and gaining their approval. An idealized image of beauty propagated with the help of the visual medias at large, has resulted with women having dysphoric perceptions of themselves often resulting in drastic measures such as eating disorders and cosmetic surgery. Men’s idealization and sexualization of women through these male constructed images, can be seen everywhere in advertisements, films, magazines, television, and social media platforms. This plethora of images has affected to a great extent how women perceive and view themselves.

Challenging leading conceptual representations of femininity and the portrayal of women as the objects of the male gaze in a vastly visual culture, formed the foundation of the second wave of the feminist movement and is still a matter of contention in a post-feminism age. Thus feminists condemned and criticized the roles of women in the film industry, where the roles of women were confined mostly to

images of women as victims, the whore or the fallen woman, or the dutiful mother or housewife. Viewing women in these constricted roles is not limited to films but is sustained in other aspects of pop culture as well. Perpetuating these traditional feminine stereotypes becomes a means of enabling women to be oppressed by men and to propagate patriarchal ideology. Andi Zeisler in *Feminism and Pop Culture* attributes how the male gaze is responsible for how women are viewed in pop culture and how it becomes a feminist project to change these views: “And the concept of the male gaze itself is one that’s crucial to understanding why reforming and reframing popular culture is a feminist project.” (7) Zeisler further states how the male gaze is responsible for making women see themselves as men do:

...Mulvey pinpointed the way the images of women onscreen (and by extension, on television, in magazines, on billboards...) seek to align viewers of any gender with the male gaze. So it makes sense that many girls and women grow up seeing images of girls and women the way men do – the images themselves are simply constructed that way. The mother figure is sexless; the cheerleader is hypersexual. The girl alone in her house is a potential victim, the man coming to the door an obvious rapist. Seeing the visual cues of the male gaze, in turn, affects how women understand images of other women on screen. (8)

Films have always had a much larger function and role beyond that of entertainment. They are important reflections and signifiers of dominant ideologies within a culture. The American film industry, namely Hollywood upholds globally the promulgation of a dominant patriarchal discourse that persistently promotes stereotypes of feminine roles and representations that encompasses their appearances, behaviours and sexuality. The patriarchal discourse gains a hegemony over other discourses within a patriarchal culture. Hollywood films in particular which have gained worldwide recognition and popularity without a doubt are most effective in the dispersal of the prevailing patriarchal ideology and the perpetuation of traditional feminine roles, which influences the limited ways in which women are represented in culture and society. M. Hunter Vaughan in his essay “Eyes Wide Shut: Kino-Eye Wide Open” situates Mulvey’s explanation of the effect of the male gaze in films:

As men have traditionally held the means of production in the film industry, Mulvey argues that the representation of women has been derived from a heterosexual male pleasure found in looking at them. Part of a representational symbiosis, the male pleasure found in looking at women coincides with the representation of the female desire to be visually objectified, what Mulvey calls the woman's "to-be-looked-at-ness." In Mulvey's estimation, in dominant heteronormative codes of cinematic as well as other forms of audio-visual mass media, men desire women by displacing them as an object of vision, whereas female desire is found in the status of being this object. (45)

In other words women are under the control of the male gaze and their roles in a patriarchal culture is defined by being the objects of the male dominated gaze.

How does the male gaze affect women? Under the male gaze theory women are defined by how men see them and this affects how they view themselves. Their sense of worth, their values and social success, their dignity and their access to material means are determined by the male gaze. Images of women that are seen around us and in the media are social mirrors that influences how women identify themselves. The images or characters that are projected on the screen, the contents from social media and advertising are powerful instruments in constructing a woman's perception of the self. The male gaze idealizes women, where women are treated like commodities and their sense of worth measured around a market dynamic. In a patriarchal society, women are controlled by the male gaze and this defines their identity. This may have a negative effect on women as the anticipation of the male gaze may lead women to self-objectify excessively, which in turn may affect their mental health. The pervasive temperament of male fantasies that are voyeuristically projected on women, makes women perceive themselves as only catering to the needs of men.

The danger and limitations of the male gaze lies in its role of relegating women to secondary roles where women perform demeaning roles and serve only as sexual stimulation or visual ornaments to their male counterparts. These images projected by the male gaze reinforce stereotypical ideology of how women should conform to certain behaviour and appearances.

The question then that arises is whether there is a corresponding female gaze that is independent of the male gaze which regulates how women perceive themselves. Andy Zeisler is of the opinion: “What “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” didn’t suggest, however, is that perhaps there is a corresponding female gaze that informs how women see images of both themselves and of men and affects the images they themselves create.” (9) The argument here lies in the premises that spectatorship cannot simply be defined only as male. One has to take into consideration that spectators can comprise of women, and gay men and women, and viewership is done not only from a male stance. Zeisler goes on to say:

This, of course, has largely to do with the fact that female screenwriters and directors were few and far between at the time Mulvey was writing – and, in many places, remain so. Since the 1975 publication of Mulvey’s article, feminists and cultural critics have responded to it – both directly and indirectly – with essays and books that attempt to define a female gaze and parse the many ways in which images of women can be claimed as powerful and even subversive. (9)

It can be argued that Laura Mulvey’s theory that the male gaze focuses on the females as objects only, is somewhat obsolete and as a spectator the female being passive does not hold true. In today’s popular culture women are more active in identifying with their favourite characters on the screen. Identification can occur at different stages from admiration or idolizing of looks and talents to emulating them as role models, which results in consumption such as fashion or cosmetics. Mary Ann Doane in her work “Caught and Rebecca: The Inscription of Femininity as Absence” discusses how Laura Mulvey in her essay on visual pleasure confines her argument to the cinema of Hollywood with a dominant male force; yet Doane argues that there could be a parallel cinema with the focus on the female spectator:

It is quite appropriate that Laura Mulvey, in her influential essay on visual pleasure, limits her discussion to a Hollywood Cinema populated by male protagonists acting as relays in a complex process designed to insure the ego-fortification of the male spectator. Yet there is a sense in which the ‘woman’s film’ attempts to constitute itself as the mirror image of this dominant cinema, obsessively centering and re-centering a female protagonist. It thus offers

resistance to an analysis which stresses the 'to-be-looked-at-ness' of the woman, her objectification as spectacle according to the masculine structure of the gaze. Hence it becomes crucial in an investigation of the 'woman's film' to trace the vicissitudes of the process of specularization. One assumption behind the positing of a female spectator (that is, one who does not assume a masculine position with respect to the reflected image of her own body) is that it is no longer necessary to invest the look with desire in quite the same way. (71)

This leads to the supposition that female gaze will have different objectives and results when compared to the male gaze. The male gaze evokes desire, a need to possess and subjugate whereas the female gaze projects a sense of identification with the female protagonist on the screen.

Although the gaze theory was largely coined with the intention of describing the effect of the male gaze on women, that is the effect of the gaze of the considered dominant gender on the weaker gender or sex, implying a power structure at play, the female gaze became a response to this unequal display of power in media representation. It becomes a critique of the power dynamic created by the male gaze, inherent in the act of looking and being looked at. The importance and the significance of the female gaze is the validation of female perspectives and experiences through visual media. The female gaze is conceivably not merely the antithetical objectification of women by men but a commentary of the power dynamics that is intrinsic in the process of looking and being looked at. What seems to be the distinction between the male and the female gaze is that the male gaze determines a subject-object relationship that places female characters at a disadvantaged position, on an emotional, narrative and sexual level; whereas the female gaze avoids this power constructed relationship.

The gaze cannot be narrowed down only to that of the male, as one has to acknowledge that the audience does not only comprise of male audience. For instance, the men in the audience identify with the male hero or the other male characters on the screen while the female audience identify with the heroine or the other female characters. Undoubtedly films have become such commercial commodities that identification in films has translated into a consumption culture

which in turn means that film makers to attract more spectators/gaze will make films that provide more attractions like nudity, actions, extravagant sets, etc. The identification process that involves imitation ensures that consumer products which a film or any other audio/visual medium may promote, such as clothes, luxury items, etc. are marketed by making them attractive and identifiable with the spectators. Thus the acknowledgment of an alternate female gaze from an economic stance becomes crucial and relevant as women make up a very large part of the consumers.

According to the data collected by the website ‘girlpowermarketing.com’ from different sources, women consumers in the United States have grown substantially and make up a significant part of the consuming power of the American economy. Furthermore, based on the data collected by the website, women who make up more than half of the U.S. population control or influence around 85% of consumer spending. (Source, Forbes 2019) This has resulted in the purchasing power of women in the U.S. to range from five trillion dollars to fifteen trillion dollars annually. (Source, Nielson Consumer 2013) With this increase in purchasing power women are foraying into more male territory, purchasing over 50% of traditional male products that include automobiles, electronics, and home improvement products. (Source, Andrea Learned ‘Don’t Think Pink’) The data also shows that approximately 40% of U.S. working women now earn more than their spouses. (Source, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics)

With a growing purchasing force and power made up of women, more women are indisputably now in control of the gaze when it comes to a consumerist culture where an awareness of their needs and wants are put to the forefront. This is significant as money is fast becoming a signifier of power in contemporary society, and as such not only men but women equate money with power. In the novel and its film adaptation, *Sex and the City*, money plays an important role in representing women. “*Sex and the City*, with its premise that women in their thirties who have enough money and power don’t need men for anything but sex, seemed to reduce all the goals of feminism to one: cold, hard cash.” (Zeisler 101) Samantha in *Sex and the City* equates money and sex as tools of power. Economic independence along with the purchasing power that it is associated with, becomes a significant part of the representation and identification of the women in *Sex and the City*.

Jackie Stacey a feminist film theorist in her book *Star Gazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship* explains how viewing the female body in films accommodates a discourse within a consumer culture:

The female body here is written about within the discourse of consumption in which little distinction is made between commodities and parts of the body: hair, eyes and 'colouring' are all parts of the female body which make up the whole star image, but can also be consumed autonomously, especially through the purchase of certain commodities. The whole body of the female star is a commodity, but the parts of her body (hair, legs, face) and the parts of her face (eyes, nose, mouth) and the parts of her eyes (colour, lashes, eyebrows) are also commodified. The female star's body is thus infinitely commodifiable... (207)

Stacey further explains that the spectators identify the female stars products for consumption. "Spectators clearly remember stars in terms of body parts they admired and, through the consumption of products, attempted to replicate their ideal through the transformation of particular body parts. The fragmentation of the female body is further commodified through the purchase of products in order to become more like star ideals." (207)

Due to the viewing of the female body as a commodity to be marketed, films and also other visual media focus on these physical aspects which have resulted in fetishism, a term that Laura Mulvey used in her seminal essay on the male gaze. This fetishism of the female body becomes an important part of marketing products and plays a significant role in the images of women on the screen. The female spectator is described by Stacey as a "consumer of images of femininity on the screen, and is also invited to recognise herself in that commodified image." (183) The female spectator desires to imitate and emulate the women she sees on the screen. The identification with the images on the screen is crucial for the female spectators, as they are seen as potential consumers and buyers of commodities that are marketed in the film. It may be noted that commodities like clothes which enhance the female body hold entirely different meaning and are different signifiers for male spectators and female spectators respectively. For male spectators the clothes on the women on the screen are meant to enhance their attractiveness and are tools in the seduction of

men, whereas for female spectators they are worn with the object of eliciting a sense of identification and aspiration to be like the women they see on the screen. Stacey observes:

It has been argued that the fetishization of the female body characterised the representation of female stars in Hollywood (Mulvey,1989). Fetishism can be related to the reproduction of feminine images both in the Marxist sense of commodity fetishism, in terms of the female body as object of patriarchal exchange, and in the more psychoanalytic sense, in terms of the fragmentation and sexualisation of parts of the female body in relation to castration anxieties, though these are not necessarily all analogous. It has been argued that fetishism on the screen, in terms of the visual conventions of Hollywood during this period which fragmented and sexualised the 'woman as body', was reinforced by the kinds of consumption encouraged by female stars. The fetishized body image was accompanied by the corresponding narcissistic forms of consumption which were centred upon the improvement of self through products related to the female body. (207)

The film adaptations *Gone with the Wind*, *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, *Sex and the City: The movie*, and *Sex and the City 2*, have focused on the female appearance and marketed the female body as a product to be consumed. The poster of *Gone with the Wind* focuses on Scarlett's bare neck and shoulders and the first shot of Scarlett in the film is Scarlett being the centre of attention flanked by the Tarlington boys. In *Breakfast at Tiffany's* the opening scene focuses on Holly Golightly and the incongruity of her chic and sophisticated look with the subdued background. In both the film adaptations of *Sex and the City* the women are portrayed as attractive and materialistic, the focus on their bodies as being commodified for consumption.

In patriarchal society feminine ideals and the concept of beauty rely strongly on the validation and approval of men. Since early times men have defined the concept of beauty for women, becoming an important currency in the marriage market. Women are viewed as commodities and the men construct the ideals for women by which they are judged upon.

Since men have used women's "beauty" as a form of currency in circulation among men, ideas about "beauty" have evolved since the Industrial Revolution

side by side with ideas about money, so that the two are virtual parallels in our consumer economy. A woman looks like a million dollars, she's a first-class beauty, her face is her fortune. In the bourgeois marriage market of the last century, women learned to understand their own beauty as part of this economy. (Wolf 20)

The male gaze has also sexualized the female body, making them the object of sexual desire. From this perspective the female beauty standard is set by men who control the gaze with the intention to sexualize women to fulfil their desires.

Although the feminist thought and its attempt to disseminate the image of the emancipated woman has been in existence for decades, mediums of pop culture, with films being the mainstream culture, still propagate the patriarchal agenda with women being dominated by the male gaze. Laura Mulvey's concept of the male gaze strongly argues that the images of women in films adheres to conventional patriarchal stereotypes. She observes:

The man controls the film phantasy and also emerges as the representative of power in a further sense: as the bearer of the look of the spectator, transferring it behind the screen to neutralise the extra-diegetic tendencies represented by woman as spectacle. This is made possible through the processes set in motion by structuring the film around a main controlling figure with whom the spectator can identify. As the spectator identifies with the main male protagonist, he projects his look on to that of his like, his screen surrogate, so that the power of the male protagonist as he controls events coincides with the active power of the erotic look, both giving a satisfying sense of omnipotence. (838)

The male spectator controls the gaze, and as he identifies with the male protagonist and projects his gaze on the screen, the female image on the screen becomes subjugated by these two forces. For instance, though the director of *The Help* Tate Taylor, has kept most of the characters' looks and personalities in line with the book's description, most of the main characters in the film are constructed under the dominance of the male gaze to please the viewers. Skeeter in the book is described as being big, tall, and awkward with red unruly hair, whereas in the film the actress Emma Stone who plays her is slender, of average height and more attractive than the

book's description of her. Hilly Brook in the book is also portrayed as being on the heavier side and more dowdy in appearance, but in the film her character performed by Bryce Dallas is slim and more poised.

In a patriarchal society, the male gaze is situated at the focal point of the process of constructing female identity and gender difference. The resulting representations that are created by the gaze are products of popular culture. In the context of feminist theory, the gaze as a means of control is a significant tool to deconstruct patriarchal narratives. Laura Mulvey's gaze theory which points to a gaze that belongs to a subject that derives scopophilic pleasure from viewing the female object, offers a means for a critical feminist exposition of visual texts and an ideologizing of the gaze and its controlling power which were difficult to address precisely.

Representations of genders in popular culture are usually reproductions of the hegemonic distribution of power between femininity and masculinity. In a patriarchal culture representations of the passive female sexual identity is constructed under the dichotomy of the two opposing images of the virginal chaste woman to the whore or the fallen woman. The female body as object of the look is the collective possession of the male gaze and the patriarchal order from which it stems from. In a western capitalist country like America that imbues patriarchal ideology, femininity is marketed as a product that women not being bearers of the look can never have control of. The structure of the patriarchal or male gaze is consolidated where women are denied the ownership of their femininity. The value of the female in a patriarchal capitalist society is measured in terms of reproductive capacity, her contribution and sacrifice to the family unit as wife and mother, to provide satisfaction and pleasure to the fetish imagination of men, and to support the system by being active consumers. Controlled by the male gaze the feminine identity is obtained by playing set roles within the structure of patriarchal boundaries.

When Laura Mulvey in 1975, coined the concept of the male gaze, she posited a connection between scopophilia and patriarchal conventions. This implies that the normative or the dominant gaze is male, masculine, and heterosexual. This does not suggest that women cannot be the bearer of the gaze, but that the gaze is conditioned to pleasure the traditionally masculine and heterosexual male. Under the

umbrella of the term the 'male gaze', even when the bearers of the gaze are women, they are conditioned to look objectively at other women through the lens of men. The primary scopophilic pleasure is derived from the control of women through the objectification of women.

One incomplete aspect of the male gaze theory is that it is constructed with the core assumption that the gaze is male and heterosexual. There are other numerous factors to be considered when applying the gaze theory, in particular, the universalization of 'male' and 'female,' not taking into consideration other differences such as that of race, class, and culture, etc. There is also the need to have a more inclusive conceptualization to address the LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender) gazes to fully comprehend the formations of different identities in popular culture. However, to explain the identity of women in visual media still relies heavily on,

...the operation of a gendered binary, with man as "bearer of the look" and woman as "object of the gaze." Today, this observation informs reading of nearly all visual media, despite the advances that Mulvey, among others, have noted in technologies that have profoundly altered what can be packed into a second of screen time. (DeTora 5)

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Chapter 3

Representation of Women in Fiction

Literature has always been a reflection of society – in its beliefs, norms and values. Cynthia Griffin Wolff in her essay “A Mirror for Men: Stereotypes of Women in Literature” states that, “Insofar as it mirrors the world, literature reflects the prevalent social attitude toward women; and since this attitude so often values men and masculine pursuits over women and feminine hobbies, women’s concerns seem devalued.” (205) Most patriarchal societies have given men greater platform and more importance than women and this is manifested in their literature. This does not mean that there is a lack of women who have been featured prominently in literature. In fact, because men are most often conditioned not to show their emotions, a large number of stories evolve around women and their feelings. Yet while there is no dearth of women characters in literature, it is the portrayal of women and their stereotypes as the weaker sex that has come under question and scrutiny.

There is no doubt that women are portrayed abundantly in literature. But more often women are marginalised and are relegated to domestic matters and problems. A prominent theme for women has always been about courtship and matrimony. It has always been deemed that the place for women in society has been the private realm of the household and that a man occupies the more public sphere of society. Cynthia Griffin Wolff further concedes that in the twentieth century there have been exceptions to this representation of women but that the significant thing is not the exceptions but that “there are so few, and that this “feminine” literature balances so insignificantly against that massive body of literature which is dominated by masculine dilemmas.” (206) Women are seen as secondary to masculine problems and any relationship women have holds meaning only in the context of their relationship with men.

America in the late nineteenth and twentieth century was a period when new images of women came to the forefront and these new images led to an acknowledgement and a more comprehensive understanding of women and their roles in society. The first wave of the Feminist Movement formally began in 1848 at the Seneca Falls Convention, in New York, where the first women’s right convention was held, and it saw the birth of woman’s suffrage, better working conditions and the enhancement of female education rights, paving the way for women’s emancipation

and a greater freedom to express themselves. They were gradually rejecting the traditional roles thrust upon them and expected of them and asserting themselves more in the public sphere of society.

Literature became a platform for women to express themselves and it became a vehicle to portray this new image of womanhood. The Feminist Movement called for a different perspective and image of women's role in literature. Women had the potential to be represented outside the domestic life and their inner desires and voice to be expressed more openly and vocally.

The second wave of the Feminist Movement in the 1960's till the late 1980's, marked by an increase of women enrolment in higher education and the establishment of women's studies sought to stand against cultural and political inequalities and discriminations. Women were coming out of their domestic shells into the public arena and asserting what they saw as their rightful place alongside that of their male counterpart. The feminist movement was further validated by the epoch publication of Betty Friedan's book *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963 which addressed the burning issues of women's discontentment with their traditional and conventional roles that were imposed by a patriarchal society. It particularly struck at the consciousness of the white middle-class women who were becoming more and more restless with the societal boundaries imposed upon them. A new perspective and voice of women was in order.

The third wave of the Feminist Movement in the early 1990's had more to do with reactions to what were discerned as failures of the second wave. Gender and sexuality took on a more post-structuralist interpretation with a more liberal acceptance and understanding of gender as beyond the dichotomy of masculinity and femininity. Whereas the second wave of the Feminist Movement was associated more with the experience of the white middle-class women, the third wave encompassed the race-related subjectivities of women as a whole. In a sense this entailed a more wider discernment of women and their role in society. The extent to which the feminist movements have affected and impacted the status quo of women in society is an important question that is needed to be asked.

Representation of women in popular culture entails a critical understanding of the nature and identity of women. Simone de Beauvoir in her work *The Second Sex*

made the statement, “One is not born, but rather becomes a woman.” (23) Judith Butler also claimed in her thesis *Gender Trouble* that the binary gender roles of female/male that are assumed by society are not natural but instead are a result of constituted discourse. Just as Michel Foucault suggested in his work *An Introduction to The History of Sexuality* while talking about sexuality “the necessity of regulating sex through useful and public discourses,” (23) the representation and identity of women, it can be argued, only exists within a socially constructed discourse, influenced by different factors. Therefore, gender roles are not inherent but constructed and assigned within a social discourse. Simone de Beauvoir went further on to state that, “history has always shown that men have always held all the concrete powers; from patriarchy’s earliest times they have deemed it useful to keep women in a state of dependence; their codes were set up against her; she was thus concretely established as the Other.” (163) The concept of the ‘Other’ according to Beauvoir lies at the very core of how women are defined in society.

This chapter critically examines the argument posited by gender theorists like Simone de Beauvoir and Judith Butler, that gender roles are not inherent but are the result of social discourse. How far has social discourse shaped the representation of women in American fiction is studied in this chapter, keeping in mind the prevailing cultural, social, and political influences. This chapter also assess the attempt to resist this discourse and whether there has been any success in shaping the discourse to the advantage of women. If the nature and identity of woman is framed within a social discourse, then what are the factors that have influenced this discourse? Has the challenge to patriarchal power and male domination resulted in change of gender roles? The question also arises, the extent to which men are responsible for constructing gender roles and whether women are also responsible for the way they are perceived and represented in society.

The first novel that is discussed in this context is Margaret Mitchell’s *Gone with the Wind*. When the novel was published in 1936, it was more than just a novel about the South during the American Civil War (1861-1865) and the Reconstruction Era (1865-1877) that followed. It embodied the new American woman who fought hard and went against the grain of society in order to survive. This emergence of a new breed of woman was represented by the main character Scarlett O’Hara, a fiery

southern belle with Irish blood, amidst a very traditional setting of the elite society of the Antebellum South. Elizabeth Fox-Genovese in her seminal work “Scarlett O’Hara: The Southern Lady as New Woman” expresses this aptly when she says, “never just another historical romance of magnolias and moonlight, *Gone with the Wind* grappled with the nature of the New South, with twentieth-century problems of social change and tension, and with the dilemmas of female identity in the modern world.” (392) Scarlett’s rite of passage raises questions on female roles and identity in the American psyche. Fox – Genovese further explains Mitchell’s intention, “by displacing Scarlett’s career historically while simultaneously confronting with contemporary dilemmas, she relies upon history and social conventions to complete the silences she leaves in her exploration of female identity, just as she relies upon them to contain, in however a contradictory fashion the painful and confusing desires of the female self.” (394)

The setting of the story is crucial to the development of Scarlett’s character in *Gone with the Wind*. The breakdown of the South and its values paving way for a new America compels Scarlett to come out of her sheltered life and force her to take on a new identity and role if she is to survive and keep her beloved Tara out of the hands of strangers. Scarlett who has always depended on her feminine wiles and charms to get her way with the men in her life, finds that they are not enough to survive in the postbellum south and she must take on more masculine and unconventional roles now as she desperately strives to save Tara. The old world of Tara where subjugation of slaves and women was rampant, with its clear demarcations and idealization of patriarchal imposed gender roles “appealed to strong imageries of masculinity, i.e. the effective display of “visible” masculine qualities, such as honor, courage, self-control, mastery, etc.” (Gros 177)

Mitchell’s two leading female characters as stereotypes represents two types of women under which women in patriarchal societies have largely been typecast – that of the virtuous woman and the sensual woman. Melanie Hamilton Wilkes the epitome of the virtuous woman is the ideal image of a woman perpetuated by patriarchal convention, almost flawless and respected by men and women alike. Scarlett O’Hara on the other spectrum represents the sensual woman disapproved and condemned by society yet at the same time having the power to arouse attention and

sexual desire. Traditionally the virtuous woman evokes respect and a more filial love. Her domain is the private sphere of domesticity where she can rule over her roost but to step out of this domestic boundary is taboo for her. The virtuous woman is represented as chaste, a role model for women but this representation can also lead to a more insipid and dull image suggesting the docility with which she accepts her role in society. When Melaine is first introduced in the novel she is described as, "...a sweet, timid face but a plain face, and she had no feminine tricks of allure to make observers forget its plainness. She looked – and was – as simple as earth, as good as bread, as transparent as spring water." (Mitchell 86)

Gerald O'Hara, Scarlett's father who perceives that Melanie is the opposite of his daughter remarks of her, "...and a sweet quiet thing she is, with never a word to say for herself, like a woman should be." (31) Melanie fulfils the expectations of traditional feminine role in a patriarchal society. Melanie and even Ellen, Scarlett's mother are stereotypes of femininity but this does not necessarily stand for weakness. Melanie as a foil to Scarlett is pictured as timid and frail but from a feminist standpoint she is the only one who truly accepts and identifies with other women regardless of who they are. Melanie is the only one who treats the pariah Belle Watling a prostitute with respect and the only one who invites her to her home. Whenever Scarlett is judged and shunned by others she stoutly defends her even when Scarlett is witnessed by India embracing her husband Ashley Wilkes. Melanie's goodness and loyalty are strong traits that even a cynic like Rhett Butler recognizes and respects. He treats Melanie like a lady and puts her on a pedestal because he genuinely is in awe of her goodness.

Ellen O'Hara, Scarlett's mother is another woman who epitomizes the virtuous woman. Ellen is the only woman that Scarlett idealizes and looks up to, yet Scarlett is never able to gain the attention she wants from her mother as she is too busy running the plantation and doing her philanthropic work. Scarlett's idealization and awe of her mother throughout the novel as the perfect woman makes her set standards of womanhood which she herself can never attain. But being Ellen, the ideal woman, entails many sacrifices that Scarlett undoubtedly knows that she can never make nor is she willing to make as much as she wants to emulate her mother. "The only difficulty was that by being just and truthful and tender and unselfish, one

missed most of the joys of life, and certainly many beaux. And life was too short to miss such pleasant things.” (154) As much as Ellen is the pinnacle of her ideal woman Scarlett recognizes that this is not attainable and realistic for her and she tries to convince herself that she will be like Ellen when she is married to Ashley and when she is old. “Reared in the tradition of great ladies” (52) Ellen knows that her life cannot be easy nor always happy but she is resigned to it as a “woman’s lot.” (52) She accepts her place and role in a “man’s world” (52) Gender roles that are assigned and imposed by a patriarchal society demands submission of women to their male counterparts even when women are more resourceful and better at their work than men. Gerald O’Hara may be the head and owner of Tara but it is under the efficient management of Ellen that the plantation runs and even Gerald is aware that it is Ellen who has the final say although it is never openly acknowledged, as running a plantation is a man’s domain.

The man owned the property, and the woman managed it. The man took the credit for the management, and the woman praised his cleverness. The man roared like a bull when a splinter was in his finger, and the woman muffled the moans of childbirth, lest she disturb him. Men were rough of speech and often drunk. Women ignored the lapses of speech and put the drunkards to bed without bitter words. Men were rude and outspoken, women were always kind, gracious and forgiving. (52)

This marginalization of women is questionable even when woman have proven to be just as adept or better than their male counterparts. As Beauvoir states, “This world has always belonged to males, and none of the reasons given for this have ever seemed sufficient.” (Beauvoir 73) Even when women like Ellen and Scarlett show more adeptness and skill running the plantation, than men like Gerald O’Hara or Ashley Wilkes, they are aware that they are stepping into male territory where they are not welcomed.

The popularity and strength of *Gone with the Wind* both in its book form and its film adaptation, amidst the historical background of America during the Civil War of the North and South, rests largely on the portrayal of its main female character Scarlett O’ Hara. If Melanie Hamilton Wilkes and Ellen O’Hara represent the stereotypical image of the virtuous or chaste woman, Scarlett represents the opposite of that image, that of the sensual woman. Cynthia Griffin Wolff defines a sensuous

woman as sensuous “because she affects men in a certain way (she arouses them, she makes them tend toward “sinful” behaviour, she intrudes into their domestic arrangements – in short, she is disruptive): and there is no place for such a character in any work of literature that is meant to conclude with social order.” (209) It is easy to categorize Scarlett as a sensuous woman because of her power over men although she is not a conventional beauty. She has no qualms over seducing other women’s men for her own benefit. From the very beginning of her introduction in part one of the novel, though there are societal influences in the way she is conditioned to act as a woman, she is in contempt of these conventional norms that dictate feminine roles. In the Antebellum south in a world of cotton plantations, slavery and the dominance of the genteel class, feminine manipulations are necessary to catch a suitable husband. Scarlett, contemptuous of “the necessity of being helpless, clinging, doe-eyed creatures” (Mitchell 69) loathes “premeditated feminine tricks” but is clever enough to know that she must employ the same tricks if she is to be successful in getting the man she wants. What sets her apart from the other young ladies and makes her a threat to them is that she does not mind flaunting her sexuality to get what she wants. She knows that if she wants to win over Ashley Wilkes she must resort to the same feminine tricks as the other woman but at the same time she knows that she will not be able to respect Ashley if he could succumb so easily to these feminine wiles. She resists accepted social feminine behaviours but at the same time she is aware that if she is to compete with the other ladies and succeed she must comply with these behaviours. There is a clear dichotomy between feminine and masculine roles that Scarlett cannot escape in the society of the Antebellum South.

Cassandra L. Langer in her book *A Feminist Critique* comments “how our society has manufactured images of sexual difference shapes our attitudes about what is appropriate masculine and feminine behaviours.” (64) She does not fit in with the ladies and the other ladies never quite know what to do with her. They are threatened by her blatant display of sexuality and her “brash” manner of eliciting the attention of the men. Scarlett is not reserved around men, she talks openly with them and flirts with them, unacceptable behaviour for a woman. In a patriarchal conservative society she is an anomaly and when her behaviour and actions are not deemed appropriate feminine behaviour the women display hostility towards her. But the very fact that

Scarlett is always competing with other women and being regarded as a threat makes her “archetypically female” according to Vicki L. Eacklor. When a woman is pitted against another woman competing for a man, it is culturally acceptable. What brings out Scarlett’s masculine trait is her inability to bond with other women.

If the old world of Southern gentility helped in a clear demarcation of feminine and masculine roles, the Postbellum South saw the subversion of these gender roles. When Scarlett takes on masculine qualities she is seen as calculating, cold-hearted and ruthless. As her world is shattered by the civil war and she finds that she cannot depend on the comfortable retreat that Tara had once offered her, Scarlett must take on roles that enable her to survive in the Reconstruction of the South. When she returns to Tara after the devastation of the war, the plantation in ruins, her father a shell of his former self, she is thrust into the role of saving Tara from ruin. Circumstances forces her to take on masculine qualities and this equates not having the leisure to delve into her emotions. She sets rules and imposes orders on everyone on the plantation. She kills a Yankee rather than let him take away all the money and precious food that Tara has left. Although her first marriage to Charles Hamilton was an impulsive move as a result of being spurned by Ashley, her second marriage to Frank Kennedy her sister’s beau is a calculated business move to save Tara. She throws herself at Rhett Butler when she sees she has no other means to save Tara. When she marries Frank she takes over his store and accounts and turns it over into a profitable business. She sees the lumber mills as an opportunity to better herself as she vows that she will never go hungry again. It is clear that to salvage Tara and to survive Scarlett must discard the more traditional female roles and take on more masculine roles for her survival and success, but this alienates her from society because traits that are considered masculine in a man are condemned in a woman.

Gone with the Wind deals with the problem of appropriating gender codes in a world that has undergone drastic changes that require “new modes of behaviour” (Genovese 399) The collapse of the South, a metaphor for Mitchell of the Great Depression of the 1920’s, necessitates a reconstruction of new values, new gender roles and new work ethics to adapt to a new world order. In postbellum Georgia the ladies are forced to step out of their traditional roles of housewives and must take on

new roles that forces them to step out of their domestic boundaries as bread earners in their families. Mitchell seems to suggest that when society subjects women to change, traditional gender roles and behaviours imposed on women are subverted to more masculine ones for survival. The implication being that feminine roles and qualities are not suited for survival.

Scarlett as the heroine of the novel goes against conventional norms of a stereotypical heroine that conforms to a more feminine narrative. She is not a conventional beauty but she is attractive and knows how to manipulate men and use her feminine charms to attract men – as any woman may do. Throughout the novel there is a continuous internal conflict between Scarlett's true self and the societal codes of being a lady. From the first time she is introduced her vitality and assertiveness are seen and she seems to affect more masculine traits of behaviour and thought. Her father having no sons treats her more like a son and she enjoys it. "She was his oldest child and, now that Gerald knew there would be no more sons to follow the three who lay in the family burying ground, he had drifted into a habit of treating her in a man-to-man manner which she found most pleasant." (29) Her love of the land and her strong attachment to it are more masculine sentiments. Scarlett's bluntness at expressing herself and her disdain for the pretences and the affectations that a young woman has to go through in genteel society alienates her from traditional feminine roles. In order to gain Ashley's attention, Scarlett is resigned to be "unnatural" and go against the very nature of her being. Kailey Schiesl comments that although Scarlett knows what society expects of her and how to act like a lady, "her true personality is contradictory of her outward representation and she resents the ladylike part she is often forced to play." (3) But the social codes which she resists are the means of providing Scarlett her acceptance in society. She is aware that her adherence to the codes also provides her protection which she desperately needs in a society that has been shaken to the grounds. Once she steps out of the sanctity of the gender code she finds herself in trouble. Driven by her need to be financially sound, her stubborn management of the timber mills and her unpopular decision of hiring convicts to work in them are moves that are not within the feminine code. Her action must have consequences and it results in the skirmish between the Yankees and the Ku Klux Klan and the loss of her husband Frank

Kennedy. The gender codes that a patriarchal society imposes on her, represses her natural vitality and sexuality. Genovese acknowledges that “vitality serves as a code word for sexuality” and claims that “Mitchell harboured conflicting attitudes towards the proper relation between sexuality, gender identity, and gender role.” (401) She argues that Scarlett invites identification, and that her career raises questions of appropriate female behaviour in a changing world. For Scarlett to adapt and survive in a new world order, it becomes pertinent to perpetuate new gender roles and resist her own natural impulses whereas for men like Rhett Butler a new world order does not necessitate defying his masculine gender code because it has already equipped him with the means of survival. Scarlett’s main problem arises not from her individualism or the ability to adapt to a world with a new set of values, but “for transgressing those boundaries at which individualism becomes greed and adaptation a threat to any viable social order.” (403)

Gone with the Wind is the story of the survival and change of the South and the story of one woman’s journey throughout it amidst the background of the Civil War between the North and the South with the issue of secession and slavery at its very core. The issue of ‘race’ dominates the identity and representation of black women. The roles of black women are not only constructed and dominated by a patriarchal society but also by a white dominant society. The representation of the black slaves in the novel is perpetuated in a light that justifies the cause of the South. The slaves of the plantations and the elite class of the South are portrayed as faithful and staunch supporters of the confederates and they harbour as much hate and resentment for the Yankee soldiers. The identity of the black woman is perpetuated by stereotypical figures like that of the Mammy. The mammy’s identity lies in her connection with the white family she serves.

First as a slave, then as a free woman, the mammy is largely associated with the care of white children or depicted with noticeable attachment to white children. Her unprecedented devotion to her white family reflects her racial inferiority. *Mammy* is often both her title and the only name she has ever been given. She may also be a cook or a personal maid to her mistress – a classic southern belle – whom she infantilizes. Her clothes are typical of a domestic:

headscarf and apron, but she is especially attracted to brightly colored, elaborately tied scarves. (Wallace 6)

Among all the slaves in *Gone with the Wind*, Mammy's character is the most controversial. Her character is often criticized as embodying and glorifying the slave culture. Her vernacular language is keenly archetypal of the black slaves and the portrayal of the stereotypical mammy borders on caricature. Her long-standing relationship with the O'Hara family relates back to the time when Ellen O' Hara was a single lady. Mitchell goes so far as to say that "she owned the O' Haras, body and soul, that their secrets were her secrets." (Mitchell 23) Mammy's complacency of her status as the head female slave and her acceptance of her slavery has been criticized as giving a false romanticized picture of slavery that is misleading. Whatever emotions or feelings she expresses are always in connection to her masters and she does not have the luxury of her thoughts and feelings as an individual being expressed. She has no voice of her own but whatever expressions she has, shows her loyalty and devotion to her mistress Scarlett O'Hara. Mitchell describes Mammy as "...black, but her code of conduct and her sense of pride were as high or as higher than those of her owner's." (23) Mammy too is dictated by a code that is perpetuated by society but added to that she has the role of being a black woman in a white patriarchal society. Mammy is a prop in the story to her mistress as many black women are when documented in fiction or films.

After the Second World War ended, the popular culture of the proceeding two decades of the 1950's and 1960's sent conflicting messages to American women. Women were told that their rightful place was at home besides their husband while on the other hand, women portrayed in fiction and films were subverting the roles of the ideal housewife. Susan J. Douglas in her book *Where the Girls Are* describes them saying, "These women and their bodies refused to be contained in the home or limited by the prevailing orthodoxy about appropriate female comportment. Their voices mattered too; often they were loud, they weren't afraid to yell, and they didn't back away from verbal combat." (50) One such depiction of a woman outside the stereotypical norms of the typical housewife was that of Truman's Capote Holly Golightly in *Breakfast at Tiffany's*.

When Truman Capote's novella *Breakfast at Tiffany's* was published in 1958, it caused a sensation with its blatant suggestion of homosexuality through the character of the narrator in the story, and bisexuality through the character of Holly Golightly. But most of all it was the profession of Holly as a call girl, her independence and the forthright expression and language used by the characters that brought this novella to the forefront. Holly Golightly was a rebel, but she made being a rebel, seem chic in her little black dress.

Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble* theorizes that gender is performative and done intentionally. She states that gender is a "corporeal style, an "act", as it were, which is both intentional and performative, where "performative" suggests a dramatic and contingent construction of meaning." (190) Holly deliberately creates her identity through her actions; by escaping her life in the country as the wife of a doctor, to the city where she becomes a socialite. Her defiance of convention and determination to be a free spirit, pushes the limits of assigned gender roles, almost to the point her performances becomes exaggerated and theatrical like a drag queen. Butler uses the term 'drag' to show that identity is constructed and invented by society. She quotes, "In imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself – as well as its contingency." (187)

Holly Golightly breaks the mold of the stereotypical, ideal image of women of the 1950's and 1960's. The woman who sacrifices her dreams for a life in the suburbs to nurture her family is lauded by convention. The role of Holly questions the concepts of femininity and she represents a new breed of woman that strives to break out of the limitations of traditional feminine roles. Holly defies conventional norms – a single independent woman in her mid-twenties who earns her living soliciting men. She has no sexual inhibitions and hints at her bisexual orientation. "Of course people couldn't help but think I may be a bit of a dyke myself. And of course I am. Everyone is; a bit." (Capote 25) Not only does her sexual orientation defy conservative gender assumptions but she also resists the stereotypical role of women fulfilling traditional roles of housewife.

Contradictory to the conventional image of the housewife tied down to the suburbs by her family, Holly considers herself "a wild thing" that cannot be caged. The ornate bird cage that she presents to the narrator for Christmas, represents the

fear that she has of being caged in and being stripped of her freedom. She makes the narrator promise never to put an actual live bird in the cage, the caged bird being symbolic of her fear of being tied down to domestic obligations. She resists stability and identity in her life. Her apartment is bare with minimal furniture, as furniture represents permanence, and permanence represents being tied down to one thing. So she lives off her suitcase, a free spirit captivated by what she sees as a better life than she had before as the country wife of Doc Golightly. She owns a cat but she refuses to give her a name, an identity, so as not to have any sentimental attachment to it.

Despite Truman Capote's celebrity status, when *Breakfast at Tiffany's* was published in Esquire magazine and in its book form, the controversy that it brought created a few problems for him. The controversial nature of the book lay with the hint of a gay male narrator and the main female character represented as an unconventional woman, hinting at her bisexuality and defying accepted norms of traditional femininity. Holly is defined through the consciousness of the narrator, making her identity more fluid where gender performances are more flexible and subverted. She defies traditional male definitions of women, resisting the conventional feminine roles that define womanhood.

In a patriarchal society that has preconceived norms, expectations and boundaries within which women are to be contained, Holly continually defies and subverts societal definitions of femininity. Patriarchal norms are unable to reconcile her complex identity. The attempt to define Holly in terms of the male viewpoint and notion is lost, as her identity becomes performative. She stubbornly resists the safe role of the complacent suburban housewife instead being drawn to the glamour of the city and the fast and independent life of a call girl. If the character of Holly Golightly was narrated through the eyes of a heterosexual male instead of a narrator that hints of his homosexuality, would she have resisted the patriarchal boundaries and submitted to conventional norms? Truman Capote himself was not heterosexual by nature which seems to reflect on his narrator, the sense of ambiguity where his sexual preferences is open to speculation.

Dina Smith in her essay "Travelling with Holly Golightly: Breakfast at Tiffany's as Cinderella Mythology" focuses on Holly's transformation from a naive country bumpkin to a socialite in New York as indicative of female social mobility.

“A poor white, Southern-farm-girl-turned starlet-turned-New York-call-girl, Holly Golightly both fascinates and repels the narrator of her story by the very libidinous terms of her mobility. She exists in the novel as the narrator’s construction: an untenable, though tantalizing, figuration of a deviant postwar female sexuality.” (1) Cinderella moving up socially by marrying the prince and in the process acquiring wealth and status, reflects the ‘American Dream’ of equal opportunity for all to achieve one’s dreams and aspirations. In the story of Cinderella, Cinderella moves up socially by marrying the prince and thus acquiring materialistic gains. Holly Golightly while embodying the ‘American Dream’ breaks away from traditional paradigms of femininity as she represents feminine independence.

Holly lives alone in an apartment in Manhattan with a cat simply named Cat as she does not want to have any emotional attachment to anything and anyone. Her apartment is bare with hardly any furnishings, and she lives off her suitcases, symbolic of her restlessness and her desire to be free. This desire for freedom, again, can be found in what Betty Friedan described in her book *The Feminine Mystique* as “a strange stirring, a sense of dissatisfaction, a yearning that women suffered in the middle of the twentieth century in the United States.” (5) Holly’s transformation from the “plump blonde little girl” (Capote 62) of the countryside married to the much older Doctor Golightly, “a Horse Doctor”, to the slim sophisticated urban woman represents the urge to act upon the restlessness that stems from a desire to break out of the traditional image of the American housewife in her perfect house with her perfect family. Holly resists being defined and categorized into any stereotypical image of women in the 1950’s that were reduced either to the demure virgins or at the opposite spectrum the women who were nothing but toys and accessories of men. Both these stereotypes are largely male construes in a patriarchal society

Holly’s identity in the novella lies in the way her sexuality is presented. The ambiguousness of her sexuality makes her identity controversial in the sense that though she operates within the hetero-normativity ideology, she embraces the post modern stance on sexuality where there are no clearly defined borders. She dates men and uses them for her own financial purposes and her ultimate goal is to marry a rich man who can provide for her well. At the same time she admits that she is a

dyke and believes that everyone has a bit of a dyke in them. Holly's views on sexuality are equivocal for on the one hand she disparages lesbian couples but in the same breath she wants a lesbian roommate acknowledging that they are good homemakers.

Holly's confession to being a "bit of a dyke" when her sexual preference points more to that of a heterosexual inclination can be explained by Judith Butler's discussion of Joan Riviere's essay "Womanliness as a Masquerade" in her work *Gender Trouble* as she indicates that "the woman who 'wishes for masculinity' is homosexual only in terms of sustaining a masculine identification, but not in terms of a sexual orientation or desire." (Butler 70) Holly's claim to be a lesbian could be explained by her desire to gain masculinity in order to survive in a patriarchal world. This can be explained by Ernest Jones' typology of women as stated in Butler's work *Gender Trouble* referring to women who, "while taking no interest in other women, wish for 'recognition' of their masculinity from men and claim to be the equals of men, or in other words, to be men themselves." (71) Holly as an independent female must take on both feminine and masculine traits to survive in an urban society that is perpetuated by patriarchal norms.

If Holly's identity lies in the way her sexuality is represented, her admission of bisexuality makes her identity ambiguous. Holly's never-ending search for belonging in a world where she defies conventional norms is also a search for her identity. She goes through a transformation from the naive child-bride of the countryside to the sophisticated independent woman of the city. But this transformation is never fully defined to its end. Butler in *Gender Trouble* discusses this concept of identity with regards to gender and sexuality as not static but rather as "the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts" (45) Butler substantiates this point of view taking Simone de Beauvoir's claim that a woman is not born but made. If this is the case Butler further claims that "it follows that *woman* itself is a term in process, a becoming, a constructing that cannot rightfully be said to originate or to end. As an ongoing discursive practice, it is open to intervention and resignification." (45) The novella ends with Holly's existence remaining a mystery, no one knowing for sure where she has ended up in and the only indication of her

presence is found in the uncanny likeness of her in an African carving. Holly's identity is never defined from the beginning till the end.

Kathryn Stockett's debut novel *The Help* published in 2009 like Margaret Mitchell's book *Gone with the Wind* is set in an important phase of American history. The novel is situated round the same era as that of Capote's *Breakfast at Tiffany's* but this time instead of the sophisticated city of New York in the North, the scene shifts to Jackson Mississippi in the South where racism and white privilege are more rampant and the Ku Klux Klan still hold their reign of terror. It is set in the turbulent 1960's of America that saw the Civil Rights Movements that dealt with issues of racism and segregation of black and white folks. It was a decade marked by anti-war protests against a very unpopular war with Vietnam. It saw the assassination of important political leaders such as President John F. Kennedy, his brother Robert Kennedy and Civil Rights Leader Martin Luther King Junior. This was an era when the second wave of Feminism was taking roots spurred on in part by the publication of Betty Friedan's book *The Feminine Mystique* and the release of President John F. Kennedy's Presidential Commission on the status of women report on gender inequality. The second wave of Feminism in America called for equal rights, equal opportunities and personal liberty for women. But the feminist movement in the 1960's was criticised for its mostly white middle-upper class women agenda propelled by Betty Friedan's exclusive targeting of them in her book.

The Help is the case where race comes into the picture and dominates the identity or representation of the gender. Butler comments in *Gender Trouble* that "the very notion of "dialogue" is culturally specific and historically bound, and while one speaker may feel secure that a conversation is happening, another may be sure it is not. The power relations that condition and limit dialogic possibilities need first to be interrogated." (20) The "power relations" in *The Help* of the main characters, the black women and the white women, is that of master and servant. This imbalance of power results in differences in identities and roles for the women, depending on the colour of their skin.

The Help has as its focal point the lives of black domestic helps and the relationship with their white employers, again perpetuating the mammy stereotype found in *Gone with the Wind*. The "mammys" of *The Help* depart from the

traditional stereotype as they are paid for their work and strive for their voices to be heard. But the question of freedom for the black maids is not better than it is for the mammy in *Gone with the Wind*. They are bound to their employers as long as they are working for them. The novel depicts the characters in a traditionally feminine environment, the home. Stockett focuses on the private spheres of the homes to bring out not only the racial tensions but also gender issues that were afflicting American society. Kathryn Stockett's story was inspired by her family's maid Demetrie when she was growing up in the state of Mississippi. The 1960's was a tumultuous period in American history and Stockett portrays the black woman experience during this time. Being black and a woman, at the lowest end of the economic ladder meant that one suffered the worst brunt of racism.

The main story of the novel unfolds in the homes of the white middle class women of Jackson, Mississippi where the voice of the black women strain to be heard. The home which is considered a traditionally feminine domain becomes a place where social change must be affected.

Critics of *The Help* have accused the author of exploiting black women experiences and writers like Valerie Smith have gone even further to criticize the character of Skeeter a white girl and one of the central characters of the novel, commenting,

like many writers who have come before her – and, indeed, many would say like Stockett herself – she is clearly appropriating the stories and memories of the disenfranchised and using them to advance her own career. Seeing her own life as uninteresting, she exoticizes the lives of women who are the victims of racial, gender, and economic oppression within the system of Jim Crow segregation. Black women's memories thus launch the plot of the narrative and Skeeter's own career trajectory.” (Smith 29)

The representation of the black women who work in the homes of the white women is central to the story yet to have any chance of being heard they have no choice but to trust a white woman to write their stories as her own. Only Aibileen writes her stories herself although it is to be a part of Skeeter's book. Stockett being a white woman and the character she chooses to write about these women's

experiences also being white, has been seen as an apologetic representation of black women experiences in a white supremacist patriarchal society.

The Help focuses on the strained relationship between black domestic workers and their white female employers in a white dominated sexist culture. Each of the women irrespective of their colour, face gender discrimination and marginalization to varying degrees. Undoubtedly the black women not only face gender marginalization but also have to face the added burden of racial discrimination in a workplace where the white woman reigns. Just as the slaves of *Gone with the Wind* face discrimination for not only being women but for the colour of their skin, black women in the sixties may not be slaves anymore but they still undergo the same discrimination as that of the slaves. However, discrimination exists on other levels as well. White women like Celia Rae Foote who comes from a lower social class faces the same discrimination from the other white women, and she is visibly shunned by them.

Eugenia Phelan, nicknamed Skeeter is a young white woman, fresh out of college and eager to join the professional world as a writer. In her small hometown of Jackson Mississippi the only place where she can hope to find a job where she can hone her writing skills is the local newspaper, writing for a column that gives advice on cleaning. Not having a clue of how to give advice on cleaning she turns to her friend Elizabeth Leefolt's maid Aibileen for help. But this is not enough for Skeeter as she is more ambitious and sets her sights higher. She turns to Elaine Stein an editor at Harper & Row, from New York to help her publish her book. As a woman Elaine empathises with Skeeter and she becomes her mentor, understanding the difficulties Skeeter faces in a male-dominated profession. Skeeter resists the conservative sexist culture of the south where women are expected to lead domesticated lives, dedicating their lives to their husbands and children. Her best friends Hilly and Elizabeth had dropped out of college in pursuit of a domesticated life, choosing the more conventional roles of middle class white women. Unlike the other white women in the book she resists this traditional feminine role thrust upon her and opts to break out of this socially accepted gender normative behaviour by having a career. She knows that in a small conservative town like Jackson that confines her to feminine roles dictated by a traditional patriarchal society she cannot

fulfil her yearning and restlessness and her only way out is the book she writes with the help of Aibileen and the other black maids. The other white women accept their roles and even try to make Skeeter conform to these traditional feminine roles. Hilly tries to find a suitable husband for Skeeter, determined that she should settle down soon and lead the same cookie-cutter life as hers. Skeeter's mother continually checks her behaviour and the clothes that she wears. Men like Stuart Whitworth, the man she is set up with by Hilly, disapproves of her writing and tries to thwart her as this is not the accepted gender norm for women, and thus could stain his image by associating with her and be a hindrance to his political career. As a white woman Skeeter is expected to keep her distance from the maids and to act as their superior and once she crosses the line by speaking up for them she is shunned by her own friends. Not only is she expected to conform within gender norms with a rigid dichotomy between male and female performances but she must not step over the demarcations that have been laid between white and black people by a racist society. Yet in order to break from these conventional gender norms and oppression Skeeter is more aware of the racial injustice that the black maids encounter in the homes of the white women. The need to go against this sexist norm and racist stance empowers Skeeter to rebel against her societal expectations of her and not to conform with racist attitudes. She rejects the conventional life that Jackson can give her and finds liberation with a new job in New York.

Skeeter like Holly Golightly in Truman's *Breakfast at Tiffany's* escapes traditional expectations of feminine roles in a patriarchal society by escaping to a busy metropolitan city like New York which is more liberal than small towns in the South. Betty Freidan explains this restlessness among white suburban women as,

the problem that has no name stirring in the minds of so many American women today is not a matter of loss of femininity or too much education, or the demands of domesticity.....we can no longer ignore that voice within women that says: 'I want something more than my husband and my children and my home.' (20)

With the second wave of the Feminist Movement encouraging more and more women to find their voice on the same cultural, political and social platform as men they were not contented anymore with the role of home-maker. The private spheres

of the home could not contain them anymore as they sought to find their niche in a male-dominated world.

Like Skeeter, Celia Rae Foote does not conform to societal norms. But while Skeeter consciously attempts to break out of traditional norms Celia constantly tries to fit into the same norms that Skeeter tries to escape from. Unlike the other white women Celia comes from a lower social background and is considered to be “white trash” although she is married to Hilly’s ex-boyfriend Johnny who belongs to the more respectable section of society. Despite marrying “one of them” Celia is never accepted by Hilly and the other white women into their crowd. The social marginalization of the white lower class especially in the Southern states of America were given the derogatory slur of “white trash”. Celia is unaware of the social conventions of treating black maids as her inferior and even Minny her maid who is conditioned to be treated as such, does not know how to reciprocate being treated like an equal. But in the end Minny shares a deep bond and friendship with Celia and social boundaries are crossed just by this friendly interaction. In *Gone with the Wind* we see an entirely different perspective of white trash discrimination. Not only do the white folks but the slaves too, are in contempt of the white trash like Emmie Slattery and even Mammie refers to her as “poor white trash”. Celia Foote’s need to be accepted by society and to fulfil the feminine roles expected of her, leads to her desperate and futile attempts to bear her husband a baby. Her pregnancies terminated by her miscarriages furthers her sense of failure as a woman. As much as she is eager to offer herself to the other women for charity work she is never invited to be a part of these events. In the end with the help of Minny and her supportive loving husband Celia realises that these societal expectations are not the most important thing and in the end she is able to stand up to the bullying of Hilly Holbrook by making a snide reference about Hilly eating Minny’s shit while writing out a cheque to her.

The Help rests mainly on the story of its two main characters Aibileen Clark and Minny Jackson, both black maids working in white homes. In the acknowledgment of her book Kathryn Stockett mentions her family’s black maid Demetrie who made a big impact on her young life and in the article “A Southern Mirrored Window” by Motoko Rich in *The New York Times* he reports,

The first voice to come to her was that of Demetrie, the African-American maid who worked for Miss Stockett's grandmother in Jackson in the 1970s and '80s. "She came out in the voice of Aibileen," Ms. Stockett said in a telephone interview from her home in Atlanta. "Then a few months later I came back to it and I found that Aibileen had a few things to say that were not in character, and that's how Minny got started. (1)

Kathryn Stockett has often come under fire as a white author capitalizing on the black women's experiences. The Open Statement of the Association of Black Women Historians (ABWH) expresses their disappointment for not adequately representing black women and for stereotyping them. The Open Statement declares,

The Help's representation of these women is a disappointing resurrection of Mammy—a mythical stereotype of black women who were compelled, either by slavery or segregation, to serve white families. Portrayed as asexual, loyal, and contented caretakers of whites, the caricature of Mammy allowed mainstream America to ignore the systemic racism that bound black women to back-breaking, low paying jobs where employers routinely exploited them." (1)

The Association of Black Women Historians also criticized *The Help* in both its book and film versions, claiming that the African American dialect was grossly misrepresented. The absence or reduction of black male characters as drunks or abusive was deplored as well. Another criticism was that the black domestic workers' true experience in the homes of their white employers where most often they suffered physical and verbal abuse was not adequately portrayed.

Despite these criticisms Stockett does attempt to humanize and personalise the black maids' experiences and the book that Skeeter writes on the maids' different stories and experiences, gives them a united voice to be heard outside of Jackson, Mississippi. But the question is who benefits most from the book? Taken into perspective, Skeeter has the most to gain. The publication of the book and its popular reception by the public means that she is able to leave Jackson for a better job in New York. For the black women whose lives are what the book's success hinges on, nothing much has changed for them in their lives and most of them are still socially

and economically oppressed, though there is the realization that for the first time black women experiences are being told in their own voice.

The 1960's as an age that witnessed the second wave of the Feminist movement taking its root, meant that for many black women in America especially for those living in conservative towns like Jackson, issues pertaining to their emancipation and rights did not have the same platform as their white female counterpart. Anna Julia Cooper, a black feminist and an eminent scholar, in *A Voice from the South by a Black Woman of the South* puts this racism into perspective: "The colored woman of today occupies, one may say, a unique position in this country. In a period of itself transitional and unsettled, her status seems one of the least ascertainable and definitive of all the forces which make for our civilization. She is confronted by both a woman and a race problem, and is as yet an unknown or an unacknowledged factor in both." (134) For black women like Aibileen Clark and Minny Jackson and the other black maids, before they can even address gender inequality and gender issues, they first have to overcome racial barriers.

Aibileen who works for the Leefolts, tries to teach Mae Mobley the little white girl she looks after, about racial acceptance. Domestic maids like Aibileen and Skeeter's family maid Constantine spend their lives looking after the children of their white employers, at times showering them with more love and affection than their own mothers. Yet women like Hilly Holbrook continually find means to demean and segregate them. The campaign for the outdoor toilet for the black maids becomes a symbol for the racial discrimination and divide that existed in these white homes. Aibileen like the other maids does want to better her situation but unlike the other maids she aspires to join the workforce as a writer, an area that hardly any black women ventures into due to the barriers they face. Like her late son who was killed in an accident at his workplace, Aibileen has a creative intelligent mind and aspires to be a writer to fulfil the dreams of her deceased son. When the book which is an exposé on the lives of the maids and their employers is finally published and comes out, Aibileen is fired by her employer Elizabeth Leefolt at the instigation of Hilly, but she is offered the post that Skeeter held in the local newspaper as a writer for a column on household tips. Though this does not pay her enough and her future is uncertain, she is freed from the shackles that tie her to her white employer. Yet for

Aibileen's voice to be heard and for her to be set free, it has to be done with the help of a white woman like Skeeter.

Minny Jackson the other main character in *The Help*, has a big personality and she finds herself in trouble because she speaks her mind out. Her words, "If I'd played Mammy, I'd of told Scarlett to stick those green draperies up her white little pooper. Make her own damn man-catching dress," (Stockett 50) shows how she goes against the stereotyping of the mammy figure. But there are repercussions for going against this traditional role and she finds herself fired many times before she is finally hired by Celia. Minny defies the conventional norms of a subservient black domestic worker but the irony lies in that she is in an abusive relationship and cannot escape the physical abuse of her husband. Though she may defy her employees with her rash tongue, at home she has to play the subservient feminine role to the masculine aggressive role of her husband or she gets physically abused. Finally, as in Aibileen's case, the book liberates her and she finally has the courage to leave her abusive husband with her children.

The message in *The Help* is still that the colour of one's skin matters in overcoming gender norms and conventional feminine stereotype when one lives in a culture that is not only a sexist but a racist culture as well. Not surprisingly Skeeter profits the most from the book and she is able to escape the traditional feminine role of settling down with a family that is expected of her as she starts her career on a new platform in New York.

The restlessness and yearning for something more fulfilling outside the traditional roles assigned to women, is what Skeeter experiences. Betty Friedan in her book *The Feminine Mystique* addresses this as "the problem that has no name." (20) It may be noted that Friedan seems to target only white middle class women and as such the other women of colour in America like the Aibeles and Minnys of the coloured communities have been excluded. Aibeleen is creative and intelligent, and without her help Skeeter would not have been able to produce her book in the first place. As a black woman she steps out of her boundaries, defying social norms, and becomes a columnist writer knowing that her future is uncertain and knowing that she will not earn enough from her writing to sustain her. Minny defies white dominance in many ways by answering back at her employers and by using the story

of the pie with her shit in the book, she puts her safety on the line by protecting her friends. By her selfless action she empowers her friends to speak out in a society that oppresses them not only because they are black but because they are women. Yet for a woman like her at the lowest rung of society and with the need to financially support her children being more urgent now as she leaves her abusive husband, she has no other alternative but to keep working as a maid.

Candace Bushnell's book *Sex and the City* since its publication in 1997 has become iconic in American popular culture. Although chronologically the book was published before *The Help*, the time-line of the story is the most recent out of all the books discussed before. Issues of femininity and masculinity are explored throughout the book and the dialogues and the themes confront and test traditional and cultural constructions of maleness/masculinity and femaleness/femininity. What differentiates and separates the men from the women is questioned and the identity of gender and its role has manifold possibilities. Therefore, a man like Tom Peri in *Sex and the City* who steps out of the traditional role of what is expected of a male and into more feminine territory becomes an enigma that the women of New York City cannot comprehend. He is a forty-three years old "eligible Man of Manhattan" (Bushnell 20), heterosexual, coming from a wealthy manufacturing family – what one would label as a great catch. He is known as a serial dater dating at times up to twelve women a year. He is an emotional anchor to the women he dates. "His ability to empathize was a strong point. The phrase 'He's just like a girl' came up over and over again. 'He reads more fashion magazine than most women,' said Sapphire, 'and he's much more willing to fight your battles than his own.'" (24) In a book that celebrates sexual freedom embodying the spirit of the second wave of feminism, men are marginalized into traditional male roles. *Sex and the City* appears to be critical of men overstepping social boundaries of accepted female roles. Therefore, a man like Tom Peri with feminine traits becomes debatable and questioned by the women he dates, ending up alone. For all its stress on modern, urban life, it is still a world where patriarchal rules sets the norms and any deviance from these rules are looked askance upon, even by women.

In the emphasis upon femininity and female empowerment through sexual liberation in *Sex and the City* the men are presented as dysfunctional and inadequate.

If the well-educated, smart, beautiful and rich socialites and independent career women of Manhattan choose not to settle down with a man or does not find a life partner the fault is with the men. Jerry, a thirty-nine year old corporate lawyer who is married to one of those smart independent woman says of them, “They’re not crazy or neurotic. They’re not *Fatal Attraction*.” ... “Why do I know so many great women who aren’t married, and no great guys? Let’s face it, the unmarried guys in New York suck. (31)

While traditional feminine roles have been challenged in *Sex and the City*, some of the men’s role have been subverted to the extent that they are shown possessing typically considered feminine traits such as emotionalism and vulnerability. Tom Peri, a wealthy bachelor regarded as “one of the city’s most accomplished serial daters,” (21) is regarded as a legend in New York, being able to have around twelve relationships in a year. Yet, these relationships ultimately go wrong and he ends up being “dumped” by the women he dates. The problem is that, as one of the women he dates describes him, he is “an emotional Mayflower.” (24) Regarded as a “rebound man”, he is a man who reads fashion magazines more than most women do. A man like Tom Peri who readily spews out words of love and is not afraid to exhibit his emotions, makes women run away from him to other men. The women he dates are uncomfortable by his excessive show of emotions and they eventually return to the very men that they complain about. The women might profess to want their men to change yet they still yield to stereotypical roles expected of men. As Simone De Beauvoir points out in *The Second Sex* that being feminine is considered weak and passive, this applies to the male gender as well.

It is not only the men who are represented as dysfunctional. The women are equally capable of being dysfunctional as well. Bushnell describes the females that belong to the upper crust of the Manhattan scene saying: “No one has breakfast at Tiffany’s, and no one has affairs to remember – instead we have breakfast at seven A.M. and affairs we try to forget as quickly as possible. How did we get into this mess?” (Bushnell 2) The breaking of traditional stereotypical roles and the feminist ideology of sexual liberation and independence depicted in *Sex and the City* may result in dysfunctional relationships at times, but they enter these relations by choice and not the rejection of stereotypical relations.

Mr. Big, his name a phallic suggestion of his sexual prowess as a man, comes close to being the perfect man, the alpha male, but this does not impress Carrie who realizes that once she marries him she loses power and the control over her life. “Why had she thought that if they were married, she’d get the attention she wanted? Why didn’t she understand that if they did get married, she’d become more and more of an accessory? That was a pattern.” (272) Breaking out of the feminine mystique that Betty Friedan used to describe the ennui and dissatisfaction of American housewives in the 1950s in her book she says, “The feminine mystique says that the highest value and the only commitment for women is the fulfilment of their own femininity.” (Freidan 28) This fulfilment of femininity cannot be confined within the parameters of marriage, hence for liberated women like Carrie to reach self-fulfilment she must opt to be single.

In *Sex and the City* the representation of women is selective and limited to the liberated and successful career women of Manhattan who are seen as white, rich, beautiful and narcissistic. The second wave of feminism made it possible to break away from stereotypical representation of women in popular culture, with women stepping away from more traditional sexual roles. Yet regardless of this defining liberation of sexuality and defying normative definitions of femininity, female sexuality is still defined and reinforced by patriarchal ideology. The women in *Sex and the City* are privileged and independent, and are made to believe that they have the choice to dictate their relationships. But in the end it is still men who rule the world and the women who play into the fantasy of the male if she hopes to attract him. So that Carrie cynically states, “All it means is that a man has a romanticized view of you, and as soon as you become real and stop playing into his fantasy, he gets turned off.” (7)

The dichotomy between masculinity and femininity is one of the big issues in *Sex and the City*. What separates the women from the men is a question that is constantly brought up in the novel. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in her book *Epistemology of the Closet* suggests that,

Gender, then, is the far more elaborated, more fully and rigidly dichotomized social production and reproduction of male and female identities and behaviours – of male and female identities and behaviours – of male and

female *persons* – in a cultural system for which ‘male/female’ functions as a primary and perhaps model binarism affecting the structure and meaning of many, many other binarisms whose apparent connection to chromosomal sex will often be exiguous or non existent. (27)

However, the assumptions and sexual roles of male and female are not clear-cut at times with the message that there are numerous possibilities of identities. The Bone is a young much sought after male model, whose name is another phallic suggestion of sexuality and virility. He vehemently denies that he is gay and strongly asserts that he is heterosexual, yet he has a relationship with and is the boy-toy of a middle aged man. The women too, are not afraid to explore their sexuality and experience three-some sex with other women. Sometimes it is the hatred of men and an attempt to break free of them that leads one of them to say, “I wish I could be a lesbian just so I wouldn’t have to deal with men.” (202)

Qualities and traits that have been traditionally labelled as feminine such as showing vulnerability and emotions, sensitivity and dependency on others are constantly resisted by the women. The belief that these characteristics are inborn in a woman is constantly fought against. While Mr. Big wants his relationship with Carrie to end in marriage, Carrie feels that she will become just his accessory in the marriage. Rather than be vulnerable and dependent on Mr Big, Carrie chooses to be independent, physically and emotionally, so that she ends her relationship with Mr. Big. Later on when Big meets Carrie in a restaurant after they have broken up, he says to her, “You never talked about your feelings. Every time I tried to talk to you, you would go to that place in your head. You’re like a cyborg or something.” (287)

The most dominant theme in *Sex and the City* that directly challenges traditional feminine roles in pop culture is the act of transforming sexual objectification into sexual subjectification. Sexual objectification implies women being sex objects and viewed purely for sexual gratification. Conversely, sexual subjectification implies that women take control and the initiative in matters of sex. Women objectify men sexually in a reversal of role and in doing so take on emotions which are typically associated with men. In Candace Bushnell’s book of *Sex and the City*, Carrie remarks, “I think I’m turning into a man,” while discussing with her friend a sexual encounter. She further explains her bold statement by saying, “Well,

afterwards, I didn't feel a thing. I was like, gotta go to work, babe. Keep in touch. I completely forgot about him after that." (49) This sense of emotional detachment and keeping sex purely physical had been seen more as a male trait. Susan J. Douglas in *The Rise of Enlightened Sexism* describes what has been traditionally ascribed gender roles, "Men are rational, women hysterical. Freud would have loved it. Because of these wild emotions, females are utterly occupied with relationships: boy drama, who's nice, who's not, who's a bitch, who's talking about whom behind their backs, parent-child relationships." (206) In *Sex and the City*, both in the book and the adapted films, sex becomes pleasure rather than relational. Sexual double standards pave way for equal opportunity when it comes to sex. Sexuality becomes a means of attaining power and a tool to achieve their needs and ends for all. Sex is freely discussed among the four lead women characters, and any sexual exploit they might have had the night before is revealed and analysed together over food. Betty Friedan in *The Feminine Mystique* had addressed this issue of women becoming only sexual objects with no individual identity, playing a very submissive role. *Sex and the City* defies this very notion and subverts this image of women taking passive roles when it comes to sex.

An analysis of different women representing different eras of America in fiction suggests that gender identity and roles are very much shaped by social discourse. Although America is seen as one of the most progressive nation in the world, gender roles are largely dictated by a society that is patriarchal in nature. A woman who defies feminine roles that are conventionally approved by society is regarded as an anomaly, an aberrant. Despite what government legislations and the Feminist movement have done for the greater emancipation of women, providing wider platforms for women to be heard, a liberated intellectual woman still faces many hurdles and she is often judged for her choices. Cynthia Griffin Wolff explains, "so long as she is liberated, a woman is presumed to have no interest in – no feeling for – children and mothering. This stereotype seems to presume (in an ironic acceptance of the Sentimental ethic) that intellect and mothering are incompatible." (214) The presumption is that women are not capable of being feminine when they depart from feminine constructed roles into more traditionally masculine roles. It is not only men who stereotype women, but women themselves who are so conditioned

by society that they become biased and narrow their roles within the confines of these stereotypes.

From this study of different women in the selected fictions, the representation of women appears to be confirmed by Beauvoir's statement that a woman "is not born, but rather becomes." (294) She further concluded in her work *The Second Sex* that "it must be repeated again that within the human collectivity nothing is natural, and woman, among others, is a product developed by civilization." (777) Butler validates Beauvoir's claim by saying that, "if there is something right in Beauvoir's claim that one is not born, but rather *becomes* a woman, it follows that *woman* itself is a term in process, a becoming, a constructing that cannot rightfully be said to originate or end." (45) By the nature of this argument it is her situation that determines her. A woman is shaped by her surroundings and circumstances whether it is cultural, economical, or political.

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Chapter 4

Representation of Women in Films

This chapter focuses on the representation of women in the adaptations of the selected texts (examined before in chapter three) into films. The films that will be examined are *Gone with The Wind* (1939), *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (1961), *Sex and The City* (2008), *Sex and The City 2* (2010), *The Help* (2011). The representation of the women in the selected films have been examined taking into consideration the extent of adaptation of the texts with such factors as the fidelity or infidelity of the films to the primary texts. The study also explores the intertextuality and the palimpsestic nature of the adaptations from text to film. It examines the issues of male dominance and male point of view in the Hollywood film industry that have conditioned the way women are represented on screen and in the process study issues of gender bias that may occur in the film adaptations. The dominant issue of the male gaze and the extent to which representation of women on the screen has been influenced by is examined. Different aspects of the medium of films such as the narrative and visual screen is studied to evaluate their contribution to the representation of women.

Since the inception of the cinematic industry, literary adaptations have formed an intrinsic part of it. Adaptation as a process involves a change in response to its environment and circumstances. On a fundamental level adaptation is involved with conveying a form or substance from one source unto another form in the context of any media form. Yvonne Griggs in *The Bloomsbury Introduction to Adaptation Studies* contends that:

Adaptation as 'creative process' rather than as 'academic critique' has been around for as long as stories have been told. The medium used to *tell* these recycled narratives that permeate our culture varies: but the tale and its place within our culture remains a constant in one form or another. The specific origin of its birth may not always be clear, and it may be reshaped by a wide range of influences at work in its textual transformation (by the adapter's authorial intent, its mode of delivery and reception, the socio-cultural climate of its era of production, and so on), yet the tale itself continues to thrive. The adaptive process works to ensure a story's on-going re-birth within other communication platforms, other political and cultural contexts; the various taxonomies generated by adaptations theorists give us a framework for

discussion of these revised narratives and the array of influences at work in their textual re-visions. (5)

There is a disciplinary conflict between literature and film which informs adaptation theory. Earlier, adaptation theory was chiefly concerned with the literal translation of the primary literary source into the cinematic. Such study was traditionally focused on the concept of fidelity and the propagation of a hierarchy which establishes the literary text as a primary/source text, and the adaptation as the secondary text. This had the implication that the secondary text was the derivative text and hence the weaker text. Consequently, adaptations from literature into films or other forms of media were considered essentially inferior to the primary text and were spoken of in derogatory terms such as theft, desecration, weakening, and the failure to maintain the integrity of the source. Adaptations were also frequently judged on the mistaken notion that the main aim of the adaptation was just the faithful replication or imitation of the primary text, rather than acknowledging that the adaptation is a wholly different recreation. Dudley Andrew in his work *Concepts in Film Theory* stresses the tediousness of such assumptions:

Unquestionably the most frequent and most tiresome discussion of the adaptation (and of film and literature relations as well) concerns fidelity and transformation. Here it is assumed that the task of adaptation is the reproduction in cinema of something essential about an original text. Here we have a clear-cut case of film trying to measure up to a literary work, or of an audience expecting to make such a comparison. Fidelity of adaptation is conventionally treated in relation to the “letter” and to the “spirit” of the text, as though adaptation were the rendering of an interpretation of a legal precedent. (100)

However, adaptation theory has deviated from the dichotomy of film and literature and in the direction of concentrating more on multidirectional ways in a transmedia context of interpreting the text. This has meant that the focus is now more on what new form the adaptation has gained rather than what the text has lost through the process of adaptation. Film theorists like Linda Hutcheon and Robert Stam have recognized and acknowledged that the term adaptation implies a multi

layered application. Linda Hutcheon in her work *A Theory of Adaptation* explains this by stating,

First, seen as a *formal entity or product*, an adaptation is an announced and extensive transposition of a particular work or works.” (7) ... “Second, as a process of creation, the act of adaptation always involves both (re-)interpretation and then (re-)creation; (8) ... “Third, seen from the perspective of its process of reception, adaptation is a form of intertextuality: we experience adaptations (as adaptations) as palimpsests through our memory of other works that resonate through repetition with variation. (8)

Robert Stams in his work *Beyond Fidelity: The Dialogics of Adaptation* also refers to the intertextuality of adaptation:

...a single novelistic text comprises a series of verbal signals that can generate a plethora of possible readings, including even readings of the narratives itself. The literary text is not a closed, but an open structure (or, better, structuration, as the later Barthes would have it) to be reworked by boundless context. The text feeds on and is fed into an infinity permutating intertext, which is seen through ever-shifting grids of interpretation. (57)

Theories of Intertextuality have become a crucial part of studying and applying adaptation theory, with the adapted text compared and studied with not only the original text, but also with other adaptations and related texts in a continuous discourse. When the text goes through the process of adaptation, it undergoes multiple factors and forces, which are determined by the nature of the source text, the basis for the adaptation, the medium of the adaptation, market, and culture/society into which it is adapted. The adaptation thus becomes a new entity, independent of the source text, and open to new interpretations. Brian McFarlane, a film critic is aware that the source text and the adaptation in the cinematic form becomes two entirely different works as he states:

Constantly creating their own mental images of the world of a novel and its people, they [the audience] are interested in comparing their images with those created by the film-maker. But, as Christian Metz says, the reader ‘will not always find *his* film, since what he has before in the actual film is now somebody else’s phantasy. (Mcfarlane 7)

The concept of viewing adaptation as “palimpsests” (Hutcheon 8), is explored in this study, with reference to the representation of women in the selected films. The representation of women in the selected films, situating their roles and identities is focused upon. An aspect of studying these adaptations involves examining the extent to which the films have furthered the image of the women portrayed in the original texts.

When it comes to representation of women in films, there is a disparity when compared to the representation of men. Not only are men represented more in numbers but men have more diverse roles while women generally have stereotyped roles. Women are reduced to roles that have meaning only in relation to others. Sharon Smith addresses this in her work “The Image of Women in Film: Some Suggestions for Future Research” when she says:

The role of a woman in a film almost always revolves around her physical attraction and the mating games she plays with the male characters. On the other hand a man is not shown purely in relation to the female characters, but in a wide variety of roles – struggling against nature (*The Old man and the Sea*; *Moby Dick*; *2001: A Space Odyssey*), or against militarism (*Dr Strangelove*; *Catch 22*), or proving his manhood on the range (any John Wayne Western). Women provide trouble or sexual interludes for the male characters, or are not present at all. Even when the woman is the central character she is generally shown as confused, or helpless and in danger, or passive, or as a purely sexual being. It just seems odd that these few images, and others like them, are all we see of women in almost every film. [...] Since very few filmmakers have given much thought to their habits of sex-role stereotyping, even a film which has one strong female character will revert to cliché motivations and actions for the rest. (15)

Laura Mulvey in her seminal work “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” (1975) had explained that the female gaze is the same as the male gaze as it is conditioned by it. Therefore, this gives rise to the implication that a woman is conditioned to see things through the eyes of a man and will respond in many ways like her male counterpart. However, the adaptations of *Sex and the City* does attempt to break free from female stereotypical molds that have been endorsed by popular

culture, by taking a feminist stance on sexual freedom where the women are in possession of the 'gaze' and where men become the sex object. Women like Carrie Bradshaw and Samantha Jones take on the role of their male counterparts flitting from one sexual relationship to another. Sexual conquest becomes associated with power. (50) Betty Friedan in her book *The Feminine Mystique* also warns, "But what happens when a woman bases her whole identity on her sexual role; when sex is necessary to make her 'feel alive'? To state it quite simply, she puts impossible demands on her own body, her 'femaleness'..." (216)

The two movie adaptations of the book *Sex and the City* of the same name seems to repudiate this presumption by appealing to a female dominated audience that seems to dismiss the more rigid and narrow female stereotypes of either the self-sacrificing woman or the femme fatale which had been persistent in popular culture before. The four main characters of the celluloid adaptations of *Sex and the City*, living in the urban jungle of Manhattan openly talk about sex and revel in their sexual pleasures just like men. The feminist ideology seems to take root here where the women have complete independence to assert their sexual rights and pleasures, claiming ownership of the narcissistic gaze and in a reversal of roles men become the sex objects. Power becomes synonymous with sexual conquest. The person who has sexual control in the relationship becomes the one who wields the power. Power dynamics is thus equated with sexual liberation. Judith Butler elaborates; "The body gains meaning within discourse only in the context of power relations. Sexuality is an historically specific organization of power relations. Sexuality is an historically specific organization of power, discourse, bodies, and affectivity." (Butler 125)

Sex and the City, is revolutionary in the sense that the primary focus was on the women and their point of view, shying away from masculine imageries that are prevalent and dominant in media representations. To give importance to the female gaze and facilitate a paradigm shift from the male gaze to the female gaze means that the way in which the story is projected on screen must undergo a change in narration, style and focus. Therefore, the female viewpoint is emphasized through the voice of Carrie Bradshaw, and her narration through her columns become crucial.

Sex and the City celebrates femininity and sexuality, yet at the same time endorsing financial independence and liberation in a way no other films have done

so. In a symbolic scene, *In Sex and the City 2* (2010) the four friends at a nightclub in Abu Dhabi find themselves on the stage of the karaoke bar singing the song ‘I am Woman’. The song is a feminist anthem that was co-written by Helen Reddy and Ray Burton in 1972 and is a song of women empowerment. As the four women, Carrie, Samantha, Miranda and Charlotte sing the song, it becomes a narrative of the film’s message on the empowerment of women in a patriarchal society. Rachel Brodsky in her article “Helen Reddy’s ‘I am Woman’: The Story Behind The Song”, published on 1st March 2022, said about the song: “... ‘I am Woman’ was Reddy sounding off about the entertainment industry and all of the demeaning comments made to her by men in positions of power. Reddy, who had secured a recording contract in 1971 with Capitol Records, was becoming interested in the burgeoning feminist movement but could not find a song that articulated anything about women’s strength. So she decided to write a song of her own.” The song articulates the strength of the four women as they make their voice heard in a world dominated by men, (ironically in the United Emirates, a country where discrimination of women still prevails despite their constitution guaranteeing gender equality) and in this sense this feminist anthem becomes their anthem as the four of them sing together:

I am Woman, hear me roar
 In numbers too big to ignore
 And I know too much to go back an’ pretend
 Cause I’ve heard it all before
 And I’ve been down there on the floor
 No one’s ever gonna keep me down again
 ...If I have to, I can do anything
 I am strong (strong)
 I am invincible (invincible)
 I am woman.” (00.54.10)

The ideology of female bonding or ‘sisterhood’ is prominent. Being independent and finding emotional support from each other does not mean that the four main characters of *Sex and the City* give up on a successful relationship with a man. The bond that these women share means that they unconditionally support each other. Sexuality is out in the open and both the films of *Sex and the City* explore the

raw sensual sex lives of these women. Sexual exploits not only abound in the text and films of *Sex and the City* but becomes the main subject over their meals when the four main characters get together. What was once considered a taboo subject, where 'nice women' did not openly talk about their sexual feelings, leaving it to the privacy of their bedrooms, *Sex and the City* is all about the celebration of their sexuality. Candace Bushnell's book *Sex and the City* and its celluloid adaptations appeals to a mass female audience because it attempts to dismiss stereotypical images of women that had been prevalent in popular culture for many years which had been subsequently described by Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* where traditional views considered that a woman's place was at home keeping the hearth warm. The book *Sex and the City*, as well as its film adaptations have women talking about sex like men and more importantly, unabashedly having sex like their male counterparts. At the very core of *Sex and the City* is the feminist notion that it is the right of a women to have sexual relations and to have a right to enjoy it. Here is a world where women dictate the terms of their independence and live in a place where they have full ownership of the gaze and a narcissistic one at that, where instead of being the objects of sexual pleasures the men become their sex objects. Therefore, a man is measured and defined by his sexual competence by the women. The gaze is reversed when it comes to the question of sexuality and the women deal with their sexuality by their own terms and not the terms dictated by society.

When it comes to owning their sexuality, the character of Samantha Jones exemplifies this as no other character does. She is the only character who does not succumb to patriarchal norms. Whereas the other three lead female characters are in committed relationships that ultimately end in marriage, Samantha Jones has her own independent views on relationship, sex, and marriage, that breaks away from heteronormative norms. She acts like a man when it comes to sexual relations, believing she can do anything like a man. The men in her life are nothing more but to fulfil her physical sexual needs. In *Sex and the City: The Movie (2008)* Samantha is in a casual relationship with her protégé Smith Jerod and she does not want any serious commitment towards the relationship. When Smith presents her with a diamond ring that she had sought to get at an auction but was out bidden secretly by Smith, her first reaction instead of being overjoyed at being gifted the ring she

wanted so badly is: “But I was going to get it for myself ...” (0.28.33) “...well, just to be clear, this is a ring with Diamonds not a diamond ring, right?” (0.28.48)

The ring which is a symbol of commitment becomes a threat for Samantha as she sees it as an infringement upon her independence and freedom. Therefore, she makes it clear that the diamonds in the ring are not a sign of proposal. When Samantha slaves all day to make a meal for Jerod, and he comes home hours later she angrily confronts him telling him: “I am not the type of woman who sits home all day waiting for a man.” (0.37.12) Ultimately, she breaks up with Smith in spite of loving him. Putting herself first in her relationship she sees the danger of becoming too close to Smith Jerod, and this goes against the patriarchal notion of relationship where men are prioritized before women. Her reasoning for her breakup is: “I love you but I love me more. And I’ve been in a relationship with myself for forty-nine years and that is the one I need to work on.” (2.00.29)

The most dominant theme in *Sex and the City* that directly challenges traditional feminine roles in pop culture is transforming sexual objectification into sexual subjectification. Sexual objectification implies women being sex objects and viewed purely for sexual gratification. On the other spectrum, sexual subjectification implies that women take control and take the initiative in matters of sex. Women objectify men sexually in a reversal of role and in doing so take on emotions which are typically associated with men. In Candace Bushnell’s book *Sex and the City*, Carrie discusses her sexual encounter with her friends saying, “I think I’m turning into a man,” further explaining her bold statement by saying, “Well, afterwards, I didn’t feel a thing. I was like, gotta go to work, babe. Keep in touch. I completely forgot about him after that.” (49) This sense of emotional detachment and keeping sex purely physical had been seen as more of a male trait. Susan J. Douglas in *The Rise of Enlightened Sexism* describes what has been traditionally ascribed gender roles, “Men are rational, women hysterical. Freud would have loved it. Because of these wild emotions, females are utterly occupied with relationships: boy drama, who’s nice, who’s not, who’s a bitch, who’s talking about whom behind their backs, parent-child relationships.” (206) In *Sex and the City*, in both the book and the adapted films, sex becomes pleasure rather than relational. Sexual double standards pave way for equal opportunity when it comes to sex. Sexuality becomes a means of

attaining power and a tool to achieve their needs and ends. Sex is freely discussed among the four lead women characters, and any sexual exploit they might have had the night before is revealed and analyzed together over food. Betty Friedan in *The Feminine Mystique* had addressed this issue of women becoming only sexual objects with no individual identity, playing a very submissive role. In both the book and its filmic adaptations, *Sex and the City* defies this very notion and subverts this image of women taking passive roles when it comes to sex. Female pleasure is given importance thereby challenging male dominant representations in media. Samantha's sexual drive is like that of a man, and is driven more by physical lust whereas traditionally women equate sex with love on a more emotional level.

Sex and the City represents a world where women are feminist but at the same time feminine and attractive. The women in this world are sexually, financially independent and although it can be argued that in the celluloid adaptations of the book, patriarchal ideology of marriage is strongly dominant, the women are at liberty to make their choice. Samantha Jones stands as an example of the liberated woman who stands firm in her choice of being single. Miranda, the tough lawyer, works while her husband stays at home with their child, a reversal of roles in a patriarchal society. The popularity of *Sex and the City* with its storyline of four independent modern women living in what Susan J. Douglas describes in her book *The Rise of Enlightened Sexism* as a "timeless world of shopping and female bonding" (175), is testament to the changing image of women in Popular Culture. But even the liberated and successful women of *Sex and the City* recognize that they still face numerous obstacles in a world that is still dominated by men. When Miranda in *Sex and the City 2* has a sudden epiphany on why her boss ignores her most of the time, her words sum up the prevailing hurdle that women still face despite the advances women have made to be heard and be relevant in a man's world. They are seen as threats in upsetting the power structure in society where men have the upper hand. "You know I'm just realizing it wasn't my tone of voice that my boss didn't like. It was the fact that I had a voice. Men in the U.S. pretend they're comfortable with strong women but really a lot of them would prefer us eating French fries behind our veils." (01.37.14)

Another aspect of female representation in films is the close connection to a consumer culture and commodification of female identity. Female representation and spectatorship in films can be seen as a form of cultural commodity and consumption. Jackie Stacey in her work *Star Gazing, Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship* makes the observation: “Femininity is constructed within a very particular set of paradoxes within the discourses of consumption – the feminine subject being the object of cultural consumption.” (189) Female spectatorship results in consumption with emphasis on the imitation of female roles that are idolized. The female identity becomes a site for commercial consumption where the female role model promotes goods for the female spectators to consume. The link between feminine representation and consumption is further explained by Stacey: “The female spectator is thus a consumer of idealized images of femininity on the screen, and is also invited to recognize herself in that commodified image which she may be able to recreate through the consumption of particular goods.” (183)

Holly Golightly in the film *Breakfast at Tiffany's* constructs for herself an identity in the midst of an exponentially growing consumer culture. When Holly casts away her former identity in Texas as the wife of a country doctor much older than her, she begins to self-actualize her new identity in the concrete world of New York. The opening scene of *Breakfast at Tiffany's* where Audrey Hepburn as Holly Golightly is seen walking up to a window of Tiffany's and looking into the display, is indicative of this new identity that she must forge in order to fit into a new world where women have more economic freedom and social mobility. Holly in her black dress, fake pearls and perfectly coiffed hair, in contrast eats croissant from a paper bag and drinks coffee from a paper cup. Betty Friedan had addressed the ‘problem’ of the modern women who were restless and not contented anymore with being suburban housewives. Holly's flight to New York to pursue her dream represents this discontent and restlessness that many women were facing in the 60's. Tiffany represents the commodification and the paradigm of the ideal woman whose identity is formed by a consumer culture. As Holly looks at her reflection in the window of Tiffany's, she has not yet attained that ideal identity that she strives for, so she mimics that identity with her inexpensive string of pearls and her black evening dress. She may not have the assurance of being provided materially as her former life

did, but in this new identity she is her own sole provider, even if it means having to eat out of paper bags. By denying herself the consumption of commodities that were available to her as a housewife, Holly assumes a subversive identity which ironically compels self – commodification. Thus, she must see different men in the powder room in order to make a living. After the iconic scene in front of Tiffany's, Holly must return to her apartment where a man who is a result of this self-commodification confronts her, yet she cannot even remember his name as he is just a means of gaining economic mobility. Holly's self-commodification means that she seeks being validated through material commodity. She tells Paul Varjak: "You can always tell what kind of person a man thinks you are by the earrings he gives you." (00.10.23) For Holly, to be able to acquire the jewelry in Tiffany's signifies that one is one step closer to becoming valuable and relevant in society. Her identity is embedded in cultural consumption that is grounded in materialism.

One of the important concepts of *Sex and the City* which is an essential part of postfeminism is the concept of a consumer culture. Consumption becomes a crucial means of constructing identity. Not only goods and services are consumed but the men in their lives are presented as brands and goods to be bought. For instance, Samantha Jones' investment in Smith's career buys her a sexual relationship. Sex is seen as a commodity to be consumed.

To substantiate the female stance or perspective, female consumerism becomes an important aspect of *Sex and the City*. In the first movie adaptation of *Sex and the City: The Movie* (2008), after the shots of the concrete jungle of New York, in the opening scene, the camera zooms in on a window display that is filled with designer goods while a young woman in her twenties looks in hungrily at the display. The narratorial voice of Carrie in *Sex and the City: The Movie* (2008) explains, "Year after year, 20 – something women come to New York City in search of the two L's: Labels and Love." (2:24:30) Love, sexual relationships are all measured in terms of their commercial relevance and the abundance of designer labels in both the movies are a testament to the relevance of a consumer culture and the identification of women in terms of their assets and commodities.

The representation of women in popular culture seems to conform to Karl Marx's theory of commodity fetishism where the obsession with material

possessions is emphasized upon and success seems to be equated with consumption power. In Dominic Strinati's *An Introduction to Theories of Popular Culture, second edition*, he explains this fetish saying:

Money exemplifies how social relations between people can assume the fantastic form of a relation defined by a 'thing', that is money, and is the basic definition of the value of commodities for people in capitalistic societies. This is why we are supposed to venerate the price we pay for the ticket to the concert rather than the concert itself. (51)

The obsession with designer clothes and shoes, the importance given to appearances in *Sex and the City* is a testament to the homage paid to commodity fetish. In *Sex and the City: The Movie (2008)* the four lead female actors in their first appearance together in the film are seen going to an auction of the private jewelry of a woman who has been abandoned by her rich boyfriend. As the voice of Carrie Bradshaw explains: "Blake Elkenn was a waitress turned model turned actress turned billionaire's girlfriend who came home one night to find herself unceremoniously turned out on the street." (07.83) Blair had decided to take revenge on her boyfriend by having a very public auction of all the jewelry he had given her. She takes revenge and control of her life by this act of merchandising. The balance of power has been restored by this very public and humiliating auction of her boyfriend's gifts.

While women in general have to face marginalization and being stereotyped on screen, black women not only face these but also face racism and classism as well. Black women in Hollywood have historically been marginalized due to their sex and colour. The arrival of motion pictures in the 1890's further embedded the stereotyping of black people and the principles of racism clearly viewed on the big screen. In the early stages of the cinematic industry, black people were not even included and the roles of black people on the screen were played by white people with their faces painted black. The early portrayal of black people were more exaggerated, caricature-like characters. They were stereotyped as half-witted, lazy, and nonsensical most of the time, providing the comic relief. Black women roles in films in the 1930's and 1940's were relegated to the 'mammy' the maid servant, or as the immoral woman the 'jezebel', or as the sapphire caricature, the rude, loud and obnoxious woman.

The history of African Americans from the moment they were brought to the shores of America as slaves by the white traders, had been that of oppression and marginalization. After the end of the American Civil War in 1865, the Black Codes and Jim Crow laws that were enacted at different periods in southern United states, curtailed the rights of the African Americans as voters and enforced segregation between the Blacks and the White people. These codes were oppressive and restrictive to the extent that African Americans did not have the liberty to have equal access to jobs as the white men did; and there were restrictions to owning property as well. In 1867 the Reconstruction Act reduced the influence of the Black Codes by making it compulsory for all the states to maintain equal protection of all races under the 14th Amendment enabling Black men to vote. (Until 1920, women in general were not allowed to vote in federal elections). When the Reconstruction officially ended in 1877, the southern states of America passed discriminatory laws to impose white supremacy. Although these laws were legally challenged by African Americans, the Supreme Court in 1896, made a ruling in *Plessy v. Ferguson* that advocated segregation of Black and White people, which included public transportations and schools. African Americans faced discrimination on commercial, legal, political, and social levels. Until the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the discrimination and segregation of Black people were legal and could be enforced.

In these conditions, African American women are faced with being double minority – not only are they black but they are also women. Representations of black women in Hollywood films portray them as minorities in society. It can be seen that historically black women have been treated inhumanly and unequally in different spheres of life. Black women's marginalization is reproduced through invisibility in different aspects of society and this is reflected too on the big screen. St. Jean and

Feagin in their work *Double Burden: Black Women and Everyday Racism* observe that: "contemporary black women are often misrepresented, mischaracterized, and misrecognized in public and private discourse." (5) They further observe that there is a negative depiction of black women as domineering or exotic sexual objects and these images are perpetuated not only by white males but even by a few black males.

Black people today are still impacted by how black slaves were physically and mentally imprisoned and this image of black slaves occupies an immense role in

defining black women's identity. One of the most prominent representation of black women especially in the early stages of Hollywood films was the mammy stereotype that portrays African American women as nannies, whose whole life and identity is tied to the white families they serve. Edward Mapp in his article "Black Women in Films" states how Black women representation in films is racially motivated and how their representations are defined by others:

The sexual dimension of American racism is reflected in the motion picture portrayal of the black women. Her film image has been defined by others rather than by herself. When she is not a figment of white male fantasy, she is a product of white female thinking. Few black female writers have gained employment in the film industry. The result is a tragic history of stereotyping and a steady procession of mammies, maids, miscegenists, matriarchs, madams and assorted "make-it-for-money" types. (42)

Gone with the Wind and *The Help* are two films that portray black women as the mammy figure stereotype. The archetypical mammy figure has been dealt with differently in both the films, but both these films have evoked an ongoing critique on their stereotypical and marginalized characterization. The mammy figure as a black female trope is presented in both the films, approached with both similar and different perspectives.

Traditionally black women when auditioning for roles in Hollywood were given very limited options, either the mammy figure or the sexualized figure such as the 'mulatto.' These stereotypical portrayals marginalizes the representation of black women, with the mammy figure representing the maternal sexless figure in the role of the servant to the white masters and mistresses, while the mulatto represented a figure whose sexuality is pivotal to her character. The mulattos were most often born out of wedlock between the promiscuous white slave owner and the black slave woman. Black women actors had no other option but to play these roles if they were to succeed professionally as actors. When Hattie McDaniel the black actress who played Mammy in *Gone With the Wind* was questioned about her role in the movie and accused of perpetuating the glorified image of slavery, she famously replied that "I'd rather play a maid than be one." (source New York Times, article by Al Young, Oct.15. 1989) Viola Davis who played the role of the maid Aibileen in *The Help* had

a different perspective on her role where she expressed regret doing the role. The reactions of both Hattie McDaniel and Viola Davis to their respective roles of the mammy/ the servant figure demonstrates how limited the representation of black women in films have been. As part of the introduction to the various film theorists, *The Feminist Film Theory* states:

If white women in film have served as signifiers of male desire, continues Modleski, then black women, when present at all, have served quite different functions. Most frequently they serve as an embodiment either of female sexuality (black female body as sexualized body) or of the maternal (black body as procreative body). Elsewhere as ‘unfeminine’ women, they seem to be coded as in the history of slavery – as not really women at all. (290)

In other words, black women when compared to white women are viewed from a completely different perspective and this arises not only because of gender issue but foremost because of race. Traditionally to put black women in their place they were not allowed to occupy the same space as their counterpart, the white women. When they are not invisible on the screen their roles are limited and stereotypical.

The characters that are portrayed by Hattie McDaniel in *Gone with the Wind* and Viola Davis in *The Help* depict black women as stereotypes – the subservient domestic help of lower economic and social status. Ironically Hattie McDaniel would become the first black actor to win an Oscar in 1939 for her performance in *Gone with the Wind* as Mammy, and it was only in 1963 that the next black person to win an Oscar, Sidney Poitier would do so for his role as Homer Smith an ex-GI in the film *Lilies of the Field*. Octavia Spenser won an Oscar as well in 2012 for Best Supporting Actress for her role as the sassy Minnie in *The Help*, while both her co-stars Jessica Chastain and Viola Davis were nominated for Best Supporting Actress and Best Actress respectively for their roles in *The Help*. In both these films the representation of black women focuses on roles that have been criticized for helping to marginalize and stereotyping black women.

Hattie McDaniel as Mammy in *Gone with the Wind* embodies the stereotypical domestic slave of the South Antebellum era, a house slave, higher than the field slaves in the hierarchy of the slaves. Mammy’s physical appearance fits the caricature depictions of the earlier mammy figure with her rotund and portly figure,

wide bulging eyes, bandana scarf wrapped around her head and her grey uniform. The domestic helps in *The Help* may not technically be owned slaves anymore yet they owe their very means of livelihood to their white masters and mistresses. Like Mammy in *Gone with the Wind* they wear grey uniforms with stiff white aprons albeit the length of their uniforms are shorter now in keeping with the era's style of fashion. The uniforms are a symbol of suppression to keep them in their place and to distinguish them from the white masters and mistresses they serve. They have never been looked upon as women like their white mistresses much less like an individual at times. The characters of the black women in both the films are shaped by the effect of the white gaze imposed on them. Seen through a white patriarchal society their characters are marginalized into the stereotypical images that are controlled by the white gaze. Black women are defined by a white gaze and a white patriarchal perspective. Black women's identity result from this white gaze, and their representation is influenced foremost by race rather than gender. Jane Gaines in her work "White Privilege and Looking Relations: Race and Gender in Feminist Film Theory" points out: "...for it is clear that Afro-American women have historically formulated identity and political allegiance in terms of race rather than gender or class." (294) She further states that black women's identity is different to that of white women: "Looking at this construction over time reveals a pattern of patriarchal phases and female sexual adjustments that has no equivalent in the history of white women in the US." (300)

In contrast to the faithful, sassy, and cantankerous character of Mammy in *Gone with the Wind*, there is Prissy acted by Butterfly McQueen, the dim-witted yet sly young black maid of the O'Hara family. In the book *Frankly, My Dear*, Molly Haskell observes:

On the other side, Prissy as comic relief with Mammy as safe harbor represent the whole tradition of desexualizing the black female: nowhere do we find the young and pretty blacks and mulattoes whose enforced relations with their masters humiliated both slaves and mistresses, the concubines who presented the planters' children with half-brothers and -sisters. (212)

This de-sexualization of their characters seems to assure the safety of their white mistresses and ensures that they will not usurp their white mistresses' positions from

the white male. Their representations as submissive slaves or domestic helps to their white mistresses, are defined by their de-sexualized portrayals.

When Mammy first appears on the screen in *Gone with the Wind* (08.49), she is seen with her head out of a window, calling out to the retreating figure of Scarlett, reprimanding her for leaving the house without her shawl and entreating her to come inside the house. She calls out after Scarlett with authority that only a house slave mammy can have over the white children that she herself has raised almost as her own. The relation she shares with Scarlett can be seen in the scenes where she scolds and coddles Scarlett like a young child even though she is a young lady of sixteen years when she first appears on the screen. Patricia Hill Collins in her work *Black Feminist Thought* makes an observation on the relationship that the mammy traditionally shares with the white children she raises:

By loving, nurturing, and caring for her White children and “family” better than her own, the mammy symbolizes the dominant group’s perceptions of the ideal Black female relationship to elite White male power. Even though she may be well loved and may wield considerable authority in her White “family,” the mammy still knows her “place” as obedient servant. She has accepted her subordination. (80)

In the article “The Role of the Black Mammy in the Plantation Household” the deep nurturing intimacy between the mammy and the white children she nurses is also described:

The “Black Mammy” was in intimate contact with the members of the family of her owner and reflected the ideals of the family to which she belonged. Her interests and those of her owners were so inextricably one that she is associated in the public mind more with the members of the white group than those of her own race. (352)

In the scene where Mammy urges Scarlett to eat before the barbecue at the Wilkes Estate, Mammy’s nurturing of Scarlett can be compared to a mother with a suckling infant at her breast. As Mammy coaxes and blackmails her into eating her food, Scarlett burps symbolically after she swallows her food, just like a baby after being fed. Another instance of Mammy’s closeness and familiarity with Scarlett is demonstrated in the scene (36.57) where a recently widowed Scarlett cries into the

arms of her mother. Mrs. O'Hara feeling sympathy for her grieving daughter suggests that she goes to Atlanta and stay with Melanie to take her mind off her grief. Unbeknownst to Mrs O'Hara this is exactly what Scarlett wants, while Mammy instantly sees through Scarlett's sly smile of happiness at the thought of being near Ashley with whom she is secretly in love. Mammy understands at once that this could cause trouble as she glares at a defiant Scarlett, while Mrs. O'Hara has no idea to the trouble that she could be stirring. This is an indication of how familiar Mammy is with Scarlett. It can also be noted that when Scarlett returns to Tara it is not the arms of her mother that welcomes her home but Mammy's arms.

In *The Help* the black maids are not slaves like the maids in *Gone with the Wind* who are bound to their white owners. The maids portrayed in *The Help* work for their white employees for wages, although they are still very much under the dominance of their white masters and mistresses. There is still the persistent stereotypical representation of the black woman as the mammy figure with the strong nurturing bond they share with the white children they look after. Aibileen's tender care for Mae Mobley and the love that Mae Mobley has for Aibileen, to the extent that she claims Aibileen is her "real mama" (34.43) exemplifies the mammy-white child bond. Skeeter's profound intimacy with her maid Constantine is another testament to this stereotypical representation. Both Mae Mobley and Skeeter are shown as being closer to their black maids than their own mothers.

Although the role of the stereotypical black maid is represented in both the films *Gone with the Wind* and *The Help*, there is the presence of an "oppositional gaze" while portraying these roles. Bell Hooks discusses this "oppositional gaze" where she explains: "That all attempts to repress our/black peoples' right to gaze had produced in us an overwhelming longing to look, a rebellious desire, an oppositional gaze. By courageously looking, we defiantly declared: 'Not only will I stare. I want my look to change reality.'" (Hooks 116) This suggests that there is a defiance, an opposition to the roles in which these black women have been placed in. There is a resistance to the power dynamics that is enforced upon them not only by gender but by racial factors. Bell Hook in her book *Race and Representation* examines how the resistance to this power relations between the oppressed black women and the dominant white race results in this oppositional gaze. Hooks makes the observation

that power relations as formulated by Michel Foucault can lead to a corresponding resistance to this domination in the form of the oppositional gaze.

In much of his work, Michel Foucault insist on describing domination in terms of 'relation of power' as part of an effort to challenge the assumption that 'power is a system of domination which controls everything and which leaves no room for freedom.' Emphatically stating that in all relations of power 'there is necessarily the possibility of resistance,' he invites the critical thinker to search those margins, gaps and locations on and through the body where agency can be found. (116)

Mammy's open disapproval of Scarlett's behavior at times and her disregard of Rhett Butler represents this oppositional gaze when despite her slave status she does not hold back displaying her true feelings. Prissy, imbecilic but sly, misleads Scarlett and other people into letting them believe that she can deliver Melanie's baby. Under the appearance of being dim-witted and scared, Prissy indirectly defies Scarlett and opposes her orders by not doing them. Though the characters of Mammy and Prissy are minor parts in the film, their presence is felt as they unobtrusively but stubbornly oppose the white gaze upon them. Molly Haskell in *Frankly, My Dear* interprets the result of this oppositional gaze as giving increasing power to black women:

In important if idiosyncratic ways, McDaniel's Mammy and McQueen's Prissy support the theme implicit in the movie's matriarchy, the increasing power and importance of blacks and women that in itself embodies the theme of Reconstruction as a historical force, one of a tide of popular middle-class reform movements, a spectrum of concerns widening to include equality of race and gender. (216)

The oppositional gaze in *The Help* can be identified in the actions of Aibileen and the other maids secretly defying their white masters and mistresses by telling their stories to Skeeter for her book. Minny's defiance of Hilly when she is unjustly fired for using the toilet in the house, comes in the form of a revenge pie with her faecal matter in it. On the screen, as Minny confronts Hilly, Hilly is seated while Minny stands serving her the pie. Minny has her gaze upon Hilly as she exacts her revenge and thereby challenging Hilly's domination over her. Aibileen's outburst near the end of the movie as she stands up to Hilly's accusations of stealing silver,

denotes a resistance to the power and hold the white mistresses have over their maids. In this confrontational scene, the camera closes on Aibileen defiantly looking straight into Hilly's eyes, face to face. The resistance of the black maids to their white mistresses represents the challenging of the existing power structure.

The filmic representation of women of the studied texts in chapter two undergoes a change of mode of engagement, from capturing the reader's imagination to engaging the reader to an aural and visual story. This implies that interpretation of the text will undergo transformations. Linda Hutcheon in her work *A Theory of Adaptation* noted that the adaptations of long novels into films have to go through a level of reduction to a certain degree as films have a limited time span in which to present their story. She observes: "On the contrary, a novel, in order to be dramatized, has to be distilled, reduced in size, and thus, inevitably, complexity." (36) The implicit representation of the women in the texts when translated into the adapted medium of the films are conditioned by the contextual interpretation. The functioning of the gaze in this visual medium generates what Robert Stam describes as a "plethora of possible readings," (57) that can lead to a different interpretation of the text.

The representation of the women characters in the films are decidedly shaped and influenced by the act of looking. Teresa de Lauretis in *Technologies of Gender* gives the explanation:

The apparatus of looks converging on the female figure integrates voyeurism into the conventions of storytelling, combining a direct solicitation of the scopic drive with the demands of plot, conflict, climax, and resolution. The woman is framed by the look of the camera as an icon, an image, made to be looked at by the spectator(s) as well as the male character(s), whose look most often relays the look of the audience. But it is the male protagonist, the "bearer" of the spectator's look, who also controls the events of the narrative, moving the plot forward. (99)

This implies that the gaze that controls the representation in films is male in nature, thus the adaptations will be comprehensively influenced by this male gaze. The extent to which the representations in the adaptations have been determined can be studied and explained by the functioning of the gaze.

Gone with the Wind is decisively about a woman who challenges the stereotypical representation of the southern belle, yet the image of Scarlett in the film is still dictated by the male gaze. As mentioned earlier the poster of *Gone with the Wind* depicts Scarlett in submission to Rhett Butler, with her neck and shoulder exposed to him. The male gaze dominates the spectacle at the very onset of the film through the image of the poster. Judith Mayne notes:

The spectacle effect which has received the most critical attention, however, is the practice of systematized looks and gazes in the cinema that define the structures of editing and the creation of point of view, particularly insofar as the spectator is 'sutured' into a trajectory of narrative and visual desire. It has become commonplace to note that however diverse the manifestations of spectacle in the cinema, they are all – sooner or later – about men looking at women. In Mulvey's words, the classical cinema puts forth man as bearer of the look, woman as its object. In this way, the cinema is evocative of what John Berger describes in his study of the female nude in Western oil painting, as the sexual dichotomy separating the male spectator from the 'surveyed female,' that is, the woman defined as object of the male gaze. (17)

Visual arts like films abound in symbols that validate certain messages. Symbolism in the form of clothes that are worn in the films can help to validate the presence and influence of the male gaze. Clothing becomes an important signifier of female representation under the male gaze. The impact of the gaze can be visually seen through the clothes of the actors in the film. "The costume expresses volumes to the audience before the actor speaks." (Villarreal 8) Clothes become a way of expressing and identifying gender traits as well.

Instances where the male gaze dominates in *Gone with the Wind* can be seen in the clothes of the characters especially the women. Scarlett is first represented in the film in a frilly white dress with a high neckline, a red belt at her waist, and red ribbons in her hair. When Scarlett is first introduced she is a young girl of sixteen years, still virginal represented by the white girly dress and yet the red belt and red ribbons suggest that she is coming into womanhood. At this stage of the film she represents the typical southern belle that is a product of the patriarchal society of the south. As the film progresses, Scarlett is represented as defying the conventional and

stereotypical image of the southern belle. She is depicted as a threat to the other ladies with their men, and she is visually set apart from the other ladies. At the Wilkes barbecue although she still wears white, there are green floral patterns on it, and her shoulders and cleavage are tantalizingly exposed, to indicate her more seductive nature. Her hair too is left loose and not coiffed and set properly like the other ladies. Scarlett's appearance is an indication of her deviance from the accepted norms of femininity in a patriarchal society. In contrast the other ladies are dressed modestly with long sleeves and high necklines with no skin exposed. Scarlett's character which deviates from the angel image to the fallen woman image is objectified more than the other female characters. When Scarlett who is recently widowed attends a ball, she is dressed in the conventional colour of mourning – black, that widows must wear. She is intentionally made to stand out amongst the colourful dresses of the ladies attending the ball. The iconic green 'curtain' dress that Scarlett wears in the scene where she visits Rhett Butler in prison to ask him for money to pay for the tax on Tara, symbolizes her drive and resourcefulness to survive and to bring some semblance of order in her life. It is a dark green velvet dress with ornate tassels and fringes that is meant to deceive Rhett Butler into thinking that she is living a life of opulence, while in fact the dress is made out of curtains and Scarlett is living a life of hardship. Jane Marcellus observes: "It as if the war forces her to shed the false femininity of the belle in order to search her true feminine strength. (Marcellus119) The false grandeur of the dress becomes a symbol of the femininity that Scarlett must discard to survive in the post-war South. Another symbolic dress that embodies Scarlett's fall from the ideal woman of the South is the revealing burgundy ball gown that she is forced by Rhett to wear to Ashley's birthday party. Having been caught in a compromising situation with Ashley her reputation has fallen further into disgrace and she is now forced to do the walk of shame. She arrives at the party in this striking burgundy gown with her cleavage exposed, dangling earrings, her hair in tight curls, with a burgundy-coloured net covering her hair. This costume mirrors the prostitute Belle Watling's costume, and it represents for Scarlett her image as a fallen woman. When Scarlett returns home and changes into her scarlet robe, it symbolizes her sexual passion and her sexual surrender to Rhett as he forcibly carries her to her bedroom. In the final scenes where

Scarlett is in mourning for her daughter Bonnie she is dressed in a black dress, her face plain, devoid of make-up, and her hair controlled into tight curls. As a woman she must conform again to the expectations of society, despite her need to act like a man for her survival and gain financial success.

In contrast to Scarlett, women like Ellen O'Hara and Melanie Hamilton Wilkes embody the ideal southern lady and this is reflected not only in their manners but in the way they are dressed. Ellen who is the backbone to Tara is dressed more matronly and more dignified and in darker colours. Melanie is also dressed conservatively in sober colours such as grey and pale blues that are symbolic of the confederate colours of the south.

While there are without a doubt Hollywood films that challenge the conventional patriarchal beliefs and values, mainstream Hollywood film still adheres to representing women in the stereotypical and traditional images of femininity that have been construed in a patriarchal society. The images of women on the screen are created for the objectification of the patriarchal gaze in order to attract the most audience. The three leading white female characters in the film *The Help* appears to have been constructed under the influence of the male gaze to satisfy patriarchal norms. In the text of *The Help* Skeeter is described as being too tall for a girl with unruly hair. She describes herself:

My own mother is looking at me as if I completely baffle her mind with my looks, my height, my hair. To say I have frizzy hair is an understatement. It is kinky, more pubic than cranial, and whitish blond, breaking off easily, like hay. My skin is fair and while some call this creamy, it can look downright deathly when I'm serious, which is all the time. Also, there's a slight bump of cartilage along the top of my nose. (Stockett 56)

In the film portrayed by Emma Stone, Skeeter is slender, of average height with curly hair. Although she is not portrayed as a conventional beauty, she is not awkward and unattractive as the book makes her out to be. Hilly Holbrook in the book is described as being on the heavier side and as the book progresses she seems to gain more weight. "Hilly pulls her red sweater down over the pudgy roll in her waist. She has on red-and-green plaid pants that seem to magnify her bottom, making it rounder and more forceful than ever." (Stockett 77) In the film, portrayed by

Bryce Dallas, Hilly is slender, pretty, well-dressed with perfectly coiffed hair. It is only at the end of the film when she faces the humiliation of her secret of eating Minny's faecal matters in Minny's pie being potentially exposed through the book written by Skeeter and the maids, and her perfect world where she is in control of everyone in her circle seems to fall apart; her appearance also parallels this social embarrassment with her normally coiffed hair all disheveled and a visible sore on her lips. Celia Foote (portrayed by Jessica Chastain in the film) as the 'white trash' who marries above her social status, is sexualized both in the book and in the film, with her tight revealing clothes and her bright red painted lips. The cinematic images of these three women in *The Help* define femininity that are male-hegemonic constructs that are perpetrated by a pre-dominantly patriarchal society. Laura Mulvey notes: "As an advanced representation system, the cinema poses questions of the ways the unconscious (formed by the dominant order) structure ways of seeing and pleasure in looking." (Mulvey 834) It is this "pleasure in looking" that influences the way women are represented on the screen to cater to an audience that is dominated by patriarchal values. "Unchallenged, main stream film coded the erotic into the language of the dominant patriarchal order." (Mulvey 835)

With the medium of representation changing from a literary to a cinematic form, *Breakfast at Tiffany's* narrative on screen adheres to a more traditional, socially acceptable heterosexual plot. Unlike the novella, the film adaptation written by George Axelrod, included a conventional love story for the acceptance of the audience. The Production Code Administration (PCA) which was the morality supervisory body of the trade union Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) influenced the adaptation as well, controlling and prohibiting the depiction of controversial and morally detrimental materials in films.

The text of *Breakfast at Tiffany's* and its filmic adaptation depict entirely different representations of the character of Holly and how she navigates through a world of gender differences. The Holly of the novella is unconventional, subverting the prevailing conditions of power that controls female sexuality – her identity in a constant state of flux. The Holly in the film adaptation played by the actress Audrey Hepburn, while in some aspects share some of the characteristics of the portrayal of Holly in the novella, in the film she is represented as more conventional, conforming

to the more socially accepted image of womanhood, where her ideal place in the world, and the one that makes her feel good like she does when she is in Tiffany's, is besides a man.

In the novella Holly is seen through the consciousness of the male narrator, while in the film she is presented from a male dominated point of view. Though she runs away from her previous life of being Lulamae, a country girl married to Doc Golightly, a man old enough to be her father, to come to the city, taking on a new identity, finding sexual liberation and independence from conventional roles, she cannot escape from being controlled by the men in her life. Men like Rusty Trawler, Jose de Silva, and Sally Tomato whom Holly attempts to use for her own advantage, abandon her in the end. Initially the film *Breakfast at Tiffany's* seems to provide a fresh and innovative interpretation of womanhood, but in actuality it subverts Holly's attempt at independence and freedom. While in the novella Holly's image as a carefree spirit unburdened by the conventional roles of society is left intact, the film reinforces traditional gender roles. At the end of the film unlike the novella Holly seems to accept the institution of marriage by putting on the ring that Paul had engraved at Tiffany's and ending up in the arms of Paul. The film reinforces patriarchal standpoints as it represents women as finding a sense of completion only in marriage and depicting men as the dominant force in relationships.

The film adaptations of *Sex and the City* undoubtedly plays to the strong female characters of the story, emphasizing in particular upon the female bond they share in a man's world. Arguably the manner in which gender is portrayed in the media affects and influences the way in which one -perceive gender roles. Apart from Samantha Jones, the other three lead females in the films may be financially independent and to a great extent even dictate the terms of their relationships, but their roles in the films succumb more to the conventional gender roles in which ultimately the men in their lives get what they want. Miranda's husband cheats on her with Miranda leaving him, but eventually she comes back to him. Big who does not want a big publicized wedding, also gets his way in the end when Carrie and Big are married in City Hall. Charlotte from the very beginning accepts her traditional feminine role of bride, housewife and mother. The novel portrays very different roles for the four main female characters. In the novel Big gets married to someone else

while Carrie remains single. Samantha Jones is in a relationship but with marriage not in the future. In the book Charlotte is just a minor character, a promiscuous English woman, while in the adaptations she is the old-fashioned stereotypical housewife. Miranda's appearance in the novel is fleeting with no mention of her relationship and family life as shown in the adaptations. Though the two films of *Sex and the City* attempts to break the barriers of stereotypical gender roles they cannot escape the censure of the male gaze. When it comes to relationships, ultimately the patriarchal order is maintained and the male gaze dictates and dominates the power status of relationships.

This study of the representation of the women in the film adaptations of the selected texts seems to suggest that there is a strong male dominance and influence in these representations. Though the films that have been analyzed in this study are films that centre around dynamic and strong women characters, patriarchal ideology seems to have perpetuated the representation of these women on the screen. If one takes the view of feminists like Laura Mulvey into consideration who asserts that throughout the history of Hollywood cinema women have been substantially marginalized in films, and that the existent images of women on the screen are depictions and creations of women by men, this would explain the identities of women still being constructed by patriarchal ideology. Smelik observes:

The narrative structure of traditional cinema establishes the male character as active and powerful: he is the agent around whom the dramatic action unfolds and the look gets organized. The female character is passive and powerless: she is the object of desire for the male character(s). (Smelik 491)

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Chapter 5

Conclusion

This concluding chapter recapitulates the preceding chapters and highlights the final outcome of the thesis. Examining the representation of women in selected novels and their adapted films, the study critically comprehends the various components and factors that are responsible for the representation of women in American popular culture.

While popular culture can be defined and interpreted in several ways, it has been mainly referred to as a kind of mass culture accepted by a majority of people in the society. John Storey acknowledges: "...popular culture is always defined, implicitly or explicitly, in contrast to other `conceptual categories: folk culture, mass culture, dominant culture, working-class culture, etc. A full definition must always take this into account." (1) Dominic Strinati also points out: "...popular culture itself has to be seen as a diverse and varied set of genres, texts, images and representations which can be found across a range of different media." (37)

These definitions imply that popular culture has an extensive influence on society through a vast range of different mediums and media, determining and shaping societal attitudes, beliefs and values.

The influence of America on the world as a dominant super power has resulted in the influence of American culture on a global scale. The two main cultural export of America films and music, has a large impact globally on an artistic and commercial level, the 'American way of life' brought into countless of homes around the world through these artistic mediums. Globalization has in part resulted in this strong influence of American culture; the global popularity of American popular culture being inseparably tied to the American dream. Lane Crothers in his book *Globalization and American Popular Culture* acknowledges this: "American popular culture is inextricably bound up with the hopes and dreams of people around the world. People all over the planet want to enjoy American popular culture." (39)

Fundamentally, as Hollywood challenges and reasserts patriarchal norms and beliefs, images of women on the one hand concentrates on female appearance and beauty, at the same time portraying negative images of women. Images of women in Hollywood are subjected to male superiority and this may result in obstacles for women attempting to find their ideal identities as unattainable standards, which do not correspond to the experiences of real women. As cinematic images of women

define femininity in ways which are perceived as real, women must realize and understand that femininity is a male dominated visual construct in a patriarchal order, in order that women find their true identities. One must take into consideration that visual media claims to depict reality that is perpetuated by a patriarchal society. The influence of American pop culture globally is so substantial that the representation of women in its visual media, especially films has an extensive impact on the rest of the world with an international audience that emulates American cultural products.

Patriarchal societies are more inductive to giving men greater platform to express and present themselves than women, and this is reflected in their literature. Undoubtedly there is a plethora of women portrayals in literature, with a large number of stories being centered around women. However, the problem lies in the portrayal of women and the stereotyping of women in traditional roles of the weaker sex. While there is an abundance of female roles in literature, women are marginalized into certain stereotypical roles that are shaped by patriarchal beliefs and notions. A common image of women in the patriarchal hegemony are the roles relegated to the household and family. Women have held secondary roles to men, and their relationships have been defined and held meaning only in the context of their relationship to men.

The Feminist Movement which formally began in 1848, opened the way for women's emancipation and greater freedom of expression. The traditional roles that were imposed upon women were rejected and they became more assertive in the public sphere. Literature was a means for women to express themselves. The second wave of the Feminist Movement that began in the 1960's till the late 1980's that was manifestly facilitated by the publication of Betty Friedan's book *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963 confronted the discontentment of women with their traditional roles within the patriarchy, resulting in seeking a new perspective and representation of women. The third wave in the early 1990's, concentrating more on gender and sexuality, adopted a post-structuralist interpretation with a liberal understanding and representation of gender. The third wave of the Feminist Movement elicited a wider perspective of women and their role in society.

Understanding and defining representation of women in popular culture invokes a critical understanding of the nature and identity of women. If the argument

posited by feminists such as Simone de Beauvoir and Judith Butler that gender roles are not inherent but are constructed and assigned within a social construct; it follows then that the identity, representation and roles of American women also only exist within a social discourse, affected by different factors. In a patriarchal society like that of America, Beauvoir's concept of woman being "being condemned to play the role of the Other" (88) fundamentally dictates how women are defined in society. She further substantiates this view by stating, "the place of woman in society is always the one they assign her." (88) Gender roles must adapt to the changing values even within a patriarchal order. Scarlett's character in *Gone with the Wind* for her survival depends on her assuming more masculine roles. Scarlett who uses her feminine ruses and appeal to get what she wants finds out that in the postbellum south in order to survive, she must assume more masculine roles that are unorthodox for women. But the novel at the same time recognizes that feminine women can adapt and survive in a patriarchal order without rejecting their femininity. Melanie Hamilton Wilkes who represents the embodiment of virtue is the ideal image of a woman sustained by patriarchal conventions. Though she represents the stereotypical traditional feminine woman, she is not necessarily weak. From a feminist perspective although her femininity makes her appear weak and fragile she is the only woman in the novel who genuinely accepts other women regardless of who they are. *Gone with the Wind* challenges gender roles as it appropriates new gender codes in a world that undergone momentous changes. But the implication seems to suggest that when society subjects women to change, traditional feminine roles must be rejected for more masculine ones to survive. The inference being that feminine roles are not suited for survival. A continuous conflict with Scarlett arises between her true self and the gender codes that society imposes upon her. While *Gone with the Wind* presents a heroine that breaks social conventions, for Scarlett the very social codes that she resists are the means for providing her acceptance and protection in society. Once she steps out of the conventional feminine role, she finds herself in trouble. Scarlett as the heroine of the novel goes against conventional norms of a stereotypical heroine that conforms to a more feminine narrative. Driven by her need to be financially sound, her stubborn management of the timber mills and her unpopular decision of hiring convicts to work in them are moves that are not within

the feminine code. The gender codes that a patriarchal society imposes on her, represses her natural vitality and sexuality.

After the Second World War ended, the popular culture of the proceeding two decades of the 1950's and 1960's sent conflicting messages to American women. Women were told that their rightful place was at home besides their husband while on the other hand, women portrayed in fiction and films were subverting the roles of the ideal housewife. One such depiction of a woman outside the stereotypical norms of the typical housewife was that of Truman's Capote Holly Golightly in *Breakfast at Tiffany's*. Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble* theorizes that gender is performative and done intentionally. She states that gender is a "corporeal style, an "act", as it were, which is both intentional and performative, where "performative" suggests a dramatic and contingent construction of meaning." (190) Holly deliberately creates her identity through her actions, by escaping her life in the country as the wife of a doctor, to the city where she becomes a socialite. Her defiance of convention and determination to be a free spirit, pushes the limits of assigned gender roles. The role of Holly questions the concepts of femininity and she represents a new breed of woman that strives to break out of the limitations of traditional feminine roles. Holly defies conventional norms – a single independent woman in her mid-twenties who earns her living soliciting men. She defies traditional male definitions of women, resisting the conventional feminine roles that define womanhood. In a patriarchal society that has preconceived norms, expectations and boundaries within which women are to be contained, Holly continually defies and subverts societal definitions of femininity. Patriarchal norms are unable to reconcile her complex identity. The attempt to define Holly in terms of the male viewpoint and notion is lost, as her identity becomes performative. She stubbornly resists the safe role of the complacent suburban housewife instead being drawn to the glamour of the city and the fast and independent life of a call girl. If Holly's identity lies in the way her sexuality is represented, her admission of bisexuality makes her identity ambiguous. Holly's never-ending search for belonging in a world where she defies conventional norms is also a search for her identity. She goes through a transformation from the naive child-bride of the countryside to the sophisticated independent woman of the city. But this transformation is never fully defined to its end. Butler in *Gender Trouble*

discusses this concept of identity with regards to gender and sexuality as not static but rather as “the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts” (45) Butler substantiates this point of view taking Simone de Beauvoir’s claim that a woman is not born but made.

When a woman’s identity is not only shaped by her gender but her race, she faces double discrimination in a patriarchal society like that of America. *The Help* is the case where race comes into the picture and dominates the identity or representation of the gender. Butler comments in *Gender Trouble* that “the very notion of “dialogue” is culturally specific and historically bound, and while one speaker may feel secure that a conversation is happening, another may be sure it is not. The power relations that condition and limit dialogic possibilities need first to be interrogated.” (20) The “power relations” of the main characters in *The Help*, the black women and the white women, is that of master and servant. This imbalance of power results in differences in identities and roles for the women, depending on the colour of their skin. Stockett being a white woman and the character she chooses to write about these women’s experiences also being white, has been seen as an apologetic representation of black women experiences as in a white supremacist patriarchal society. *The Help* focuses on the strained relationship between black domestic workers and their white female employers in a white dominated sexist culture. Each of the women irrespective of their colour face gender discrimination and marginalization to varying degrees. Undoubtedly, the black women not only face gender marginalization but also have to face the added burden of racial discrimination in a workplace where the white woman rules. Just as the slaves of *Gone with the Wind* face discrimination for not only being women but for the colour of their skin, black women in the sixties may not be slaves anymore but they still face the same discrimination that the slaves faced.

Discrimination for women goes further than the colour of one’s skin but is also based on conforming to traditional feminine roles that are defined by a patriarchal society. A woman like Skeeter is seen as an outsider because she steps out of the norms of socially accepted gender roles. Unlike the other white women in the book she resists this traditional feminine role thrust upon her and opts to break out of this socially accepted gender normative behaviour by having a career. She knows that in

a small conservative town like Jackson that confines her to feminine roles dictated by a traditional patriarchal society she cannot fulfil her yearning and restlessness and her only way out is the book she writes with the help of Aibileen and the other black maids. The other white women accept their roles and even try to make Skeeter conform to these traditional feminine roles. Hilly tries to find a suitable husband for Skeeter, determined that she should settle down soon and lead the same cookie-cutter life as hers. Skeeter's mother continually checks her behavior and the clothes that she wears. Men like Stuart Whitworth, the man she is set up with by Hilly, disapproves of her writing and tries to prevent her as this is not the accepted gender norm for women, and thus could stain his image by associating with her and be a hindrance to his political career. Not only is she expected to conform within gender norms with a rigid dichotomy between male and female performances but she must not step over the demarcations that have been laid between white and black people by a racist society. Yet in order to break from these conventional gender norms and oppression Skeeter is more aware of the racial injustice that the black maids encounter in the homes of the white women.

Skeeter like Holly Golightly in Truman's *Breakfast at Tiffany's* escapes traditional expectations of feminine roles in a patriarchal society by escaping to a busy metropolitan city like New York which is more liberal than small towns in the South. Betty Freidan explains this restlessness among white suburban women as, "the problem that has no name stirring in the minds of so many American women today is not a matter of loss of femininity or too much education, or the demands of domesticity.....we can no longer ignore that voice within women that says: 'I want something more than my husband and my children and my home.'" (20) With the second wave of the Feminist Movement encouraging more and more women to find their voice on the same cultural, political and social platform as men they were not contented anymore with the role of home-maker. The private spheres of the home could not contain them anymore as they sought to find their niche in a male-dominated world. Like Skeeter, Celia Rae Foote does not conform to societal norms.

Stereotypical images of black women still exist and seem to be widely prevalent in the form of the mammy figure and marginalized roles. The 1960's as an age that witnessed the second wave of the Feminist movement taking its root, meant

that for many black women in America especially for those living in conservative towns like Jackson, issues pertaining to their emancipation and rights did not have the same platform as their white female counterpart. For black women like Aibileen Clark and Minny Jackson and the other black maids, before they can even address gender inequality and gender issues, they first have to overcome racial barriers. The message in *The Help* is still that the colour of one's skin matters in overcoming gender norms and conventional feminine stereotype when one lives in a culture that is not only a sexist but a racist culture as well. Not surprisingly Skeeter profits the most from the book and she is able to escape the traditional feminine role of settling down with a family that is expected of her as she starts her career on a new platform in New York.

The restlessness and yearning for something more fulfilling outside the traditional roles assigned to women, is what Skeeter experiences. Betty Friedan in her book *The Feminine Mystique* addresses this as “the problem that has no name.” (20)

Although patriarchal privilege is still widely prevalent in the representation of women in American pop culture, gender roles have been challenged. Stillion Southard in her work “Beyond the Backlash: Sex and the City and Three Feminist Struggles” recognizes that the films and also the television series of *Sex and the City* pushes gender boundaries and questions the current social norms. Issues of femininity and masculinity are explored throughout the book and the dialogues and the themes confront and test traditional and cultural constructions of maleness/masculinity and femaleness/femininity. What differentiates and separates the men from the women is questioned and the identity of gender and its role has manifold possibilities. Thus a man like Tom Peri in *Sex and the City* who steps out of the traditional role of what is expected of a male and into more feminine territory becomes an enigma that the women of New York City cannot comprehend. In the emphasis upon femininity and female empowerment through sexual liberation in *Sex and the City* the men are presented as dysfunctional and inadequate.

Feminine traits are viewed as weak and passive even in men. While traditional feminine roles have been challenged in *Sex and the City*, some of the men's roles have been subverted to the extent that they are shown possessing typically

considered feminine traits such as emotionalism and vulnerability. Tom Peri, a wealthy bachelor regarded as “one of the city’s most accomplished serial daters,” (21) is regarded as a legend in New York, being able to have around twelve relationships in a year. Yet, these relationships ultimately go wrong and he ends up being “dumped” by the women he dates. The women might profess to want their men to change yet they still yield to stereotypical roles expected of men. As Simone De Beauvoir points out in *The Second Sex* that being feminine is considered weak and passive, this applies to the male gender as well. The breaking of traditional stereotypical roles and the feminist ideology of sexual liberation and independence depicted in *Sex and the City* may result in dysfunctional relationships at times, but they enter these relations by choice and not the rejection of stereotypical relations. Breaking out of the feminine mystique that Betty Friedan used to describe the ennui and dissatisfaction of American housewives in the 1950s in her book she says, “The feminine mystique says that the highest value and the only commitment for women is the fulfilment of their own femininity.” (28) This fulfilment of femininity cannot be confined within the parameters of marriage, hence for liberated women like Carrie to reach self - fulfilment she must choose to be single. However, the assumptions and sexual roles of male and female are not clear-cut at times with the message that there are numerous possibilities of identities.

Qualities and traits that have been traditionally labelled as feminine such as showing vulnerability and emotions, sensitivity and dependency on others are constantly resisted by the women. The belief that these characteristics are inborn in a woman is constantly fought against. While Mr. Big wants his relationship with Carrie to end in marriage, Carrie feels that she will become just his accessory in the marriage. Rather than be vulnerable and dependent on Mr. Big, Carrie chooses to be independent, physically and emotionally, so that she ends her relationship with Mr. Big. Later on when Big meets Carrie in a restaurant after they have broken up, he says to her, “You never talked about your feelings. Every time I tried to talk to you, you would go to that place in your head. You’re like a cyborg or something.” (287)

The most dominant theme in *Sex and the City* that directly challenges traditional feminine roles in pop culture is the act of transforming sexual objectification into sexual subjectification. Sexual objectification implies women

being sex objects and viewed purely for sexual gratification. Conversely, sexual subjectification implies that women take control and the initiative in matters of sex. Women objectify men sexually in a reversal of role and in doing so take on emotions which are typically associated with men.

An analysis of different women representing different eras of America in fiction suggests that gender identity and roles are very much shaped by social discourse. Although America is seen as one of the most progressive nation in the world, gender roles are largely dictated by a society that is patriarchal in nature. A woman who defies feminine roles that are conventionally approved by society is regarded as an anomaly, an aberrant. Despite what government legislations and the Feminist movement have done for the greater emancipation of women, providing wider platforms for women to be heard, a liberated intellectual woman still faces many hurdles and she is often judged for her choices. Cynthia Griffin Wolff explains, “so long as she is liberated, a woman is presumed to have no interest in – no feeling for – children and mothering. This stereotype seems to presume (in an ironic acceptance of the Sentimental ethic) that intellect and mothering are incompatible.” (214) The presumption is that women are not capable of being feminine when they depart from feminine constructed roles into more traditionally masculine roles. It is not only men who stereotype women, but women themselves who are so conditioned by society that they become biased and narrow their roles within the confines of these stereotypes.

From this study of different women in the selected fictions, the representation of women appears to be confirmed by Beauvoir’s statement that a woman “is not born, but rather becomes.” (294) She further concludes that “it must be repeated again that within the human collectivity nothing is natural, and woman, among others, is a product developed by civilization.” (777) Butler validates Beauvoir’s claim by saying that, “if there is something right in Beauvoir’s claim that one is not born, but rather *becomes* a woman, it follows that *woman* itself is a term in process, a becoming, a constructing that cannot rightfully be said to originate or end.” (45) By the nature of this argument it is her situation that determines her. A woman is shaped by her surroundings and circumstances whether it is cultural, economical or political.

Undoubtedly when it comes to visual media like films, the way women are perceived to a great degree is due to the male gaze. Under the dominance of the male gaze the woman is passive and this translates to the patriarchal factor. If one takes into consideration Mulvey's argument that the male gaze supplants the female gaze in a patriarchal society, this results in an imbalance of power. The male gaze theory presumes that the viewer is male and even when the viewer is female she views through the standpoint of a man. Examining American culture and society that has been traditionally patriarchal in nature, men who are in control of the gaze dictate history and the representation of women. The male gaze theory posits that through objectification women are subjugated. This male gaze theory puts forward the argument that women are objectified by others and this conditions their self-perceptions and identity.

Feminism endeavors to impose a radical transformation of patriarchal concepts, by analytical examination of power structures within patriarchal societies, attempting to change the distribution of power where men hold power and enjoy privileges that are not attainable for women. In a society which is principally patriarchal in nature like that of America, women engage in a discourse that is dictated by men. In such conditions men are in control and play the dominant role while women are relegated to more submissive roles. In a culture that engages in a visual medium this translates into representation of women being reduced to spectacles. This is demonstrated in films when the camera focuses on certain physical aspects of women, reducing them to sexual objects. In *Gone with the Wind* Scarlett O'Hara's figure, especially her bare shoulders are focused on innumerable times. She may resist the patriarchal norms of her society, but on screen she is still objectified by the male gaze of the spectators watching the film.

Having been in existence for more than half a century the male gaze theory is an important factor for affecting the representation of women in nearly every component of pop culture. This undoubtedly has an effect on how women perceive themselves with a growing stress on outward looks and appearances. The far-reaching implication for women to be relevant in today's society is that they must attain a certain level or standard of appearance that is dictated and initiated by the dominant male gaze. Identity is embroiled upon appearance that is imposed by male

approval. Wolf concedes that this male approval governs behaviour: “Most urgently, women’s identity must be premised upon our “beauty” so that we will remain vulnerable to outside approval, carrying the vital sensitive organ of self-esteem exposed to the air.” (14)

In a patriarchal culture the discourses that arise and interrelate with one another on any one of the numerous platforms of pop culture, the discourse is structured and defined by gender conventions where the male discourse supersedes all other discourses. The male discourse is an outcome of the patriarchal order. Beauvoir believed that women are a product of this discourse: “...and woman, among others, is a product developed by civilization.” (777). The male gaze which is born out of this male discourse, projects its fantasy on the image of the female. This projection sets a certain idealization and standard that women are expected to adhere to in a patriarchal society. Naomi Wolf in her book *The Beauty Myth* explains this concept by stating that, “In assigning value to a culturally imposed physical standard, it is an expression of power relations in which women must unnaturally compete for resources that men have appropriated for themselves.” (12) This male gaze akin to Michel Foucault’s metaphor of the panopticon that continually monitors the inmates, calls for a continual monitoring of the visual images of women.

Visual medias especially medias like televisions and films that are regarded to act as social mirrors, in actual fact control and manipulate social reality and manifest traditional and conventional gender constructions under the patriarchal narrative. Even with the Feminist Movement resulting in more rights for women and significantly removing discrimination against them, the representation of gender roles still conform to patriarchal ideology demarcating the images and representation of women to traditionally stereotypical roles. However progressive Hollywood films are, they are still dictated by a largely patriarchal institution that view women as the subordinate gender and the object of the male gaze. Films that are produced in Hollywood explicitly still promulgate patriarchally influenced images of women that are controlled by the male gaze, in spite of the feminist movement and its ideals being a momentous part of American culture for more than a century. Laura Mulvey’s gaze theory reinforced the postulation that images and representations of women in Hollywood films still comply with the stereotypical patriarchal images.

This is exemplified by the filmic adaptation of *Breakfast at Tiffany's*. The Holly of the text is presented as more wild as she breaks conventional norms of the ideal woman, and the story ends ambiguously not knowing what path Holly has chosen. The film adaptation follows a more conservative approach where Holly, although she still shares the unconventional traits of the Holly in the novella ends in a monogamous relationship.

While the male gaze was coined to explain the effect of the gaze of the dominant gender on what is considered the weaker gender, inferring to a play of power structures, the female gaze became a reaction to this unequal power distribution in media representation. The female gaze as critique to the power dynamics that are inherent in the male gaze, strives to validate female perspectives and images in visual media. The female gaze is not just a result of the objection to the male gaze but a narrative where the imbalance of power distribution is avoided. This inference refers to the fact that the gaze cannot only be limited to the male. For instance, the female audience will identify with the heroine or other female characters in the film.

Films are not only means of entertainment but have become commercial commodities which means that identification in films is closely connected to a consumption culture which translates to film makers making films that depend on visual attractions. Since female consumers comprise a large part of the consumers, a female gaze from an economic viewpoint becomes critically relevant. Women have undoubtedly become a growing purchasing force and power in a consumerist culture and this has resulted in women being more in control of the gaze as their needs and wants are given more importance. Undeniably money has become a signifier of power in today's society, and for women economic independence that is linked with purchasing power becomes consequential in the representation and identification of women.

However, in a patriarchal society like that of America the male gaze still holds an influential point in the construction of female identity. Female representations in popular culture are a creation of the gaze. In the framework of feminist theory, the gaze is a controlling tool to deconstruct the patriarchal narratives.

The male gaze is at the center of the process of creating female identity and gender difference in a patriarchal society. Popular culture influences the representations that are produced as a function of the gaze. Within the framework of feminist theory, the gaze serves as a crucial instrument for dismantling patriarchal myths. Though challenging as it was to address the ideologizing of the gaze and its controlling power, Laura Mulvey's gaze theory—which identifies a gaze that belongs to a subject that derives scopophilic pleasure from viewing the female object—offers a way for a critical feminist exposition of visual texts.

In popular culture, gender representations typically replicate the hegemonic power dynamics between femininity and masculinity. Within a patriarchal society, depictions of the submissive feminine sexual identity are built upon the binary opposition of the pure, virginal woman and the whore or fallen woman. The female body as the focus of attention is a collective property of the patriarchal system that gives rise to the masculine gaze. In America and other western capitalist nations that uphold patriarchal ideologies, femininity is promoted as a commodity that women who do not fit the stereotype will never be able to manage. Where women are denied the ownership of their femininity, the patriarchal or male gaze system is solidified. In a patriarchal capitalist culture, a woman's worth is determined by her ability to procreate, her sacrifices as a wife and mother, her ability to satiate men's fetish fantasies, and her ability to actively support the system as a consumer. Playing predetermined roles within the framework of patriarchal restrictions allows the feminine identity, which is governed by the male gaze, to be realized.

When Laura Mulvey first proposed the idea of the masculine gaze in 1975, she suggested a link between scopophilia and patriarchal norms. This suggests that the dominant or normative gaze is heterosexual, male, and masculine. This suggests that the look is conditioned to please the typically heterosexual and masculine male, not that women cannot withstand the gaze. Even when women bear the gaze, they are socialized to view other women objectively through the prism of men, which is collectively referred to as the "male gaze." The main source of scopophilic pleasure comes from objectifying women in order to manipulate them.

The male gaze theory's foundational premise that the gaze is male and heterosexual leaves it lacking in some important areas. When implementing the gaze

theory, there are many other elements to take into account, especially the universalization of "male" and "female," which ignores other disparities like those based on race, class, and culture, among others. To properly understand how many identities are formed in popular culture, a more comprehensive conception of LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender) gazes is also necessary.

In terms of the portrayal of women in movies, there exists an inequality in contrast to the portrayal of men. Men not only outnumber women in representation but also have a wider variety of roles, whereas women typically have roles that conform to stereotypes. Women are confined to roles that hold significance only in the context of others.

In her groundbreaking essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975), Laura Mulvey clarified that while both the female and male gazes are conditioned by one another, they are identical. Consequently, this suggests that women are socialized to perceive the world via a masculine perspective and will behave in many ways similar to men. *Sex and the City's* adaptations do, however, make an effort to reject the conventional images of women that the media has supported by adopting a feminist perspective on sexual liberation in which women hold the "gaze" and men are reduced to objects of sex. Carrie Bradshaw and Samantha Jones are two examples of women who impersonate their male counterparts and switch up their sexual relationships frequently. Conquest of the sexual sphere is linked to power.

The monetization of female identity and its intimate relationship to consumer society is another facet of female portrayal in movies. It is possible to view female representation and filmgoer-ship as a type of cultural commodity and consumption. "Femininity is constructed within a very particular set of paradoxes within the discourses of consumption – the feminine subject being the object of cultural consumption," (189) states Jackie Stacey in her book *Star Gazing, Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship*. Female spectatorship leads to consumption, with a focus on idolizing female roles and imitating them. When a female role model endorses products for female viewers to buy, the female identity turns into a location for commercial consumption. "The female spectator is thus a consumer of idealized images of femininity on the screen, and is also invited to recognize herself in that commodified image which she may be able to recreate through the consumption of

particular goods," (183) Stacey continues, elucidating the connection between feminine representation and consumption.

In *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, Holly Golightly creates an identity for herself within a commercial culture that is expanding at an exponential rate. Holly takes on a subversive persona that, paradoxically, forces self-commodification. In order to earn a living, she had to visit different men in the powder room. Following the famous scene in front of Tiffany's, Holly has to go back to her apartment, where she is confronted with a man who is the outcome of her self-commodification; yet, because he is only a tool for her to advance economically, she is unable to even recall his name. Due to Holly's self-commodification, she looks to material possessions for validation.

The idea of a consumer culture is one of the key ideas of *Sex and the City*, which is a crucial component of post-feminism. Consumption in turn, becomes a vital tool for identity construction. In addition to consuming goods and services, the men in their lives are marketed as products and brands that should be purchased. For example, Smith has a sexual connection to Samantha Jones because of her work commitment to him. Sex is viewed as a resource to be used and abused for one's own commercial gain.

Karl Marx's theory on commodity fetishism, which emphasizes the fixation with material things and links success to consumption power appears to be supported by how women are portrayed in popular media. Dominic Strinati in *An Introduction to Theories of Popular Culture*, explains this fetish:

Money exemplifies how social relations between people can assume the fantastic form of a relation defined by a 'thing', that is, money. It is the basic definition of the value of commodities for people in capitalistic societies. This is why we are supposed to venerate the price we pay for the ticket to the concert rather than the concert itself. (51)

Black women experience racism and classism in addition to marginalization and stereotypes on screen, which affect women generally. Due to their gender and skin tone, Black women in Hollywood have always been neglected. With the introduction of motion pictures in the 1890s, racism and its stereotypes of Black people were further solidified and made visible on large screens. The history of

African Americans from the moment they were brought to the shores of America as slaves by the white traders had been that of oppression and marginalization. After the end of the American Civil War in 1865, the Black Codes and Jim Crow laws that were enacted at different periods in Southern United states, curtailed the rights of the Blacks as voters and enforced segregation between the Blacks and the White people.

African American women in these circumstances must contend with being members of two minority groups: they are women in addition to being black. Hollywood movies that feature black women depict them as social outcasts. It is evident that historically, black women have experienced inhumane and unfair treatment in a variety of contexts. Black people today are still affected by the physical and psychological confinement of black slaves, and the image of black slaves plays a significant role in defining the identity of black women. Black women's marginalization is perpetuated through their lack of visibility in various spheres of society. The mammy stereotype, which presents African American women as nannies whose entire identity and life are connected to the wealthy white family they serve, is one of the most well-known representations of black women, particularly in the early phases of Hollywood cinema. Black women are shown in two movies that embody the cliché of the mammy figure: *Gone with the Wind* and *The Help*. Although the two films handle the archetypal mammy persona in different ways, they have both sparked a continuous criticism of their stereotyped and marginalized characterization. Both movies showcase the black female stereotype known as the "mammy figure," but they do it from somewhat different angles. Put another way, black women are perceived entirely differently than white women, and this is primarily due to racial issues rather than gender issues. Black women were historically prohibited from sharing the same area as their white counterparts in order to put them in their proper place. Their roles are limited and clichéd when they are not invisible on film.

It has also been analysed how filmic representation of women differs from textual depictions. Rather than merely grabbing the reader's attention, it now draws them in with an auditory and visual narrative. This suggests that there will be changes in how the text is interpreted. In her book *A Theory of Adaptation*, Linda Hutcheon pointed out that because movies only have so much time to tell a story,

adapting lengthy texts into motion pictures requires some degree of reduction. "On the other hand, a novel has to be distilled, reduced in size, and thus, inevitably, complexity," the author notes in order to portray it. (36) Contextual interpretation influences how the women in the texts are implicitly represented when they are transformed for the cinematic media. According to Robert Stams, the way the gaze functions in this visual medium produces a "plethora of possible readings" (57) that can result in various interpretations of the text.

The act of staring clearly shapes and influences how women are portrayed in the movies. In *Technologies of Gender*, Teresa de Lauretis provides the following justification:

The machinery of gazes convergent on the female form combines a direct solicitation of the scopic desire with the requirements of plot, conflict, climax, and resolution, so integrating voyeurism into storytelling traditions. The camera angle frames the woman as an icon, an image, intended for the audience's attention as well as that of the male character or characters, whose expressions typically reflect the audience's. However, the narrative is also controlled by the male protagonist, who serves as the "bearer" of the viewer's gaze and advances the plot. (99)

This suggests that the male gaze governs representation in movies, and as a result, this male gaze will have a complete impact on the adaptations. It is possible to examine and explain how much the representations in the adaptations have been predetermined by looking at how the gaze functions. Even though *Gone with the Wind* is a bold picture about a woman who defies the traditional portrayal of the southern belle, Scarlett's image is nonetheless shaped by men's gaze.

Although mainstream Hollywood films continue to conform to the traditional and clichéd notions of womanhood that have been constructed in a patriarchal culture, there are undoubtedly films that question the conventional patriarchal beliefs and ideals. To draw in the largest audience, the patriarchal gaze is objectified through the use of pictures of women on screen. The three main white female characters in the movie *The Help* seem to have been created to conform to patriarchal standards while being influenced by men.

Undoubtedly a slew of female oriented films have been coming out of Hollywood. But if one takes the views of feminists like Clair Johnston and Laura Mulvey into consideration where they proclaim that throughout the history of cinema, women have been mostly absent in films and the women on screen are depictions and creations of women by men; that the women on screen are just images of women presented to please men and thus are not real representations of women. How then can one measure the length of progress that women have made in asserting themselves on the screen? Have women come a long way or are they still bound by sexist ideology in a male-dominated world? Susan J. Douglas in her book *Where the Girls Are* sums this up when she says:

If you look for where the girls are today, you will find fragments of many of them in each of us. We remain shattered into so many pieces, some of them imprinted by femininity, others by feminism. But they don't fit into a coherent whole. One piece might be from Roseanne, another from Thelma and Louise, another from those noxious Oil of Olay ads. And we still find ourselves riddled through with "on the one hand, on the other hand" responses to Hillary Clinton, reports on date rape. Glamour, Cher's face lifts, and Madonna. We feel our insides to be in a constant state of roiling suspension, our identities as women always contingent. (294)

If gender is a social construct as feminists like Judith Butler and Simone de Beauvoir believe, then women's identity and representation in patriarchal societies like that of America are still controlled and formed by an ideology that is dominated by men.

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Pop Culture in Selected Texts and
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ABSTRACT

**REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN AMERICAN POP
CULTURE IN SELECTED TEXTS AND FILMS**

(1936 – 2009)

AN ABSTRACT SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF
PHILSOPHY

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**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND CULTURE STUDIES
SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES AND LANGUAGES**

AUGUST, 2025

**REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN AMERICAN POP CULTURE IN
SELECTED TEXTS AND FILMS**

(1936 – 2009)

BY

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Submitted

In partial fulfillment of the requirement of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in
English and Culture Studies of Mizoram University, Aizawl

This study examines the representation of women in American pop culture in selected writings of four American authors and their adaptations into films. The novels studied for this thesis are *Gone with the Wind* (1936) by Margaret Mitchell, *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (1958) by Truman Capote, *Sex and the City* (1997) by Candace Bushnell, and *The Help* (2009) by Kathryn Stockett. The film adaptations examined are *Gone with the Wind* (1939), *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (1961), *Sex and the City* (2008), *Sex and the City 2* (2010), and *The Help* (2011).

The term “Popular Culture” was first conceived around the nineteenth century to denote the popular culture that was associated with the lower classes as opposed to the “official culture” of the upper classes. According to John Storey in his work *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: An Introduction*: “...popular culture is always defined, implicitly or explicitly, in contrast to other conceptual categories: folk culture, mass culture, dominant culture, working-class culture, etc. A full definition must always take this into account” (1).

Popular Culture, also more widely known as Pop Culture, may also refer to various cultural communication channels from an extensive array of print-based media, advertising, movies, music, novels, radio, television, and even comics. At the turn of the twentieth century “high art” was the domain of the affluent and the educated in society which subsequently led to the inception of “low art” (also known as popular art) for the interest of the lower classes. However, this class stratification became less discerned in the 1950's when pop culture gained more popularity across the different societal divides. By the 1960's, artists began merging pop culture with forms like advertisements, comics, imagery, and even movies that were adapted from high art. Today pop culture also includes digital media, embracing different forms of social platforms as means of expression and communication.

Popular culture correlated with mass media is based on certain forces of consumption, and this foundation of consumption is constructed through the implementation of representation. The concept of representation is a set of processes that signifies or stands for or portrays something else. It can be

argued that Representations are cultural constructions that are innately engaged with questions of power through the process of selection and organization that consequently is a part of representation. It entails enabling a certain awareness to exist while precluding other ways of perceptions. Representation appears to have a political connotation where one is asked to view a person in a certain way. Stuart Hall in “The Work of Representation” argues that a politic of representation must register the volatile nature of signification and effectuate a variable compliance to accept differences. It can be said that representation examines into the power relations innate in the representation of race and gender, at the same time deconstructing the distinct terms that are related to their heterogeneous binary constructions.

The present research studies and analyses the representation of women in American Pop Culture through the medium of films and the novels from which they are adapted. By studying different texts and films with diverse themes, it attempts to examine and place the stereotyping and marginalizing of women in a pre-dominant male culture taking into account different factors that can influence this perception. This research also explores the assumption that woman are represented as cultural stereotypes which serve to reproduce traditional sex roles.

Before the twentieth century, the United States of America was considered to be a cultural backwater. During this time the “American Dream” was the USA’s greatest cultural selling point to the world – an unlimited inspiration and motivation for millions of people who aspired for a better life. It was around the time of the First World War that America first began to export its culture abroad through the artistic mediums such as films and music. It was not until after the Second World War with the growth of the consumer economy and the growing popularity of the “American Lifestyle” in the 1950’s that American popular culture went global, having tremendous impact on the rest of the world. Elizabeth Wurtzel has defined the American influence on Pop Culture in her work *The Pop Culture Clause* (2010) where she states:

We invented Hollywood, rock n' roll, blue jeans, the gold rush, cable TV with thousands of channels, a military that is larger than those of the next fifteen combined, the shopping mall, and a store that sells nothing but socks. We invented Elvis and teen idols, we invented Disneyland and the roller coaster, we didn't invent the wheel but we did come up with the model T, and we didn't invent the wing but we did invent the airplane... (1)

America's cultural influence through films has been particularly widespread. When this new medium for entertainment gained popularity especially after the First World War, America was the country that led the world in this visual form of art. This trend is expounded in *Popular Culture in American History*, as:

... the real watershed event in the creation of a new visual culture was the advent of a new mass medium: film. A neurological quirk of the human brain – the illusion of motion when a series of pictures are displayed in rapid motion – became the basis for a series of converging, technological, commercial, and artistic trends that not only remade the map of popular culture but became central to American identity as a whole (indeed, movies have been our signature national export ever since the First World War, when they first captured the international market). (Cullen 117)

The global influence of American Pop Culture is so extensive that the representation of women in its media such as films, televisions and advertisements has far reaching affects. In what is largely a male-dominated industry like Hollywood, one of the biggest exports of American Pop Culture, issues of stereotyping and marginalizing women in certain roles have been closely examined and critiqued by feminists and cultural theorists alike such as Laura Mulvey and Andi Zeisler.

Chapter One: Introduction – Representation of Women in American Pop Culture

The first chapter gives an introduction to the authors and the selected works, as well as their film adaptations that are examined in this study. This

chapter situates the premises of popular culture in American Culture and examines the impact of American pop culture across the world and how different forms of media has helped to perpetuate its global image. The representation of women in American pop culture through the mediums of films and the novels from which they have been adapted is introduced and discussed in this chapter. A brief review of the selected texts and films, along with the theories that are related to the research have been given as well.

Pop Culture does not merely entail what is popular among a certain demographic. It is reflected and dictated by the political conditions and the social norms and convictions of a nation. The research analyses the narrative structures of the texts and the films selected to see how far the narratives are responsible for the stereotyping of women. It examines the extent to which the narratives are a reflection of perceived images and notions of femininity and masculinity and the extent of socio-political factors that help to influence these perceptions.

Chapter Two: Concept of the Gaze in Pop Culture

The concept of the gaze and its importance in popular culture is discussed in this chapter. It examines the ways in which Laura Mulvey's concept of the male gaze was shaped by the psychoanalytic framework of Sigmund Freud, Jacques Lacan, and Jean Paul Satre. The chapter looks at how the male gaze generates and maintains stereotypical and marginalized feminine roles and behaviors. It explores how the male gaze influences how women are portrayed in American popular culture.

An important factor of how women are perceived and represented in popular culture is the influence of the male gaze especially in visual media. The concept of the “male gaze”, first developed by feminist film critic Laura Mulvey in her 1975 essay entitled "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" is closely examined to determine the extent of male dominance in constructing cultural gender roles that reflect an underlying power asymmetry in popular culture. The male gaze implies that women in patriarchal society are objectified by men to satisfy their desires, thereby placing women in the

context of male desire. The male gaze theory was formulated by Mulvey to address the issue of how in cinema gender power asymmetry is a controlling force and is conceived for the male viewer's pleasure, in a discourse that is deeply embedded in patriarchal ideologies. Mulvey states: "Women then stands in a patriarchal culture as signifier for the male other, bound by a symbolic order in which man can live out his phantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer of meaning, not maker of meaning" (834).

The basic foundation of the concept of the gaze is traced from its roots in two twentieth century French thinkers, Jean Paul Sartre (1958-2003) and Jacques Lacan (1901-1981). Sartre's work *What is Subjectivity?* had raised the concept of subjectivity where one is the subject of another's consciousness. This is illustrated by a scene where one comes across a mannequin and for a fleeting moment is led to believe that it is another person. Sartre took specific interest in how there is a change in the person's consciousness the moment there is the awareness that one might not be alone and is observed by others.

Lacan re-interpreted and analyzed Sigmund Freud's concept of the *ego*, and explained this through his concept of the mirror stage. This theoretical work became an important foundation for many film theorists who attempted to explain the cinematic experience that was constituted by the gaze. Anneke Smelik explains Lacan's conception of the mirror stage in her article "Male Gaze in Cinema":

The mirror image is an imaginary idealization, because the child projects an ideal image of itself onto the mirror. This ideal self-image leads the child to a first awareness of the ego. The recognition of the self in the mirror image is simultaneously a "mis"-recognition (*meconnaissance*), because the child identifies with the image of itself as an other, that is to say, as a better self than he or she will hope to be in the future. (1)

The gaze can also become a tool for control and the means for manipulation. Michel Foucault in his work *Discipline and Punishment, The*

Birth of the Prison (1977) discussed the gaze and its role in perpetuating power-relations in the penal system. When examining Foucault's theory of the controlling power of the gaze in the penal system, one observes the regulatory effects that the gaze has on today's modern world. "He is seen, but he does not see; he is the object of information, never a subject in communication" (200).

The masculine gaze was blamed for the disparity in gender power and the ensuing discrimination between the sexes. According to Andi Zeisler, in *Feminism and Pop Culture*, "the Male Gaze affects how women view pop culture and how we view ourselves" (7).

According to the male gaze theory of Mulvey the viewer is assumed to be a man, and even if the viewer is a woman, she sees the world through the perspective of the man rather than herself. Women's perceptions are shaped by the male gaze, which portrays males as dominant forces, particularly in the arts and media. The woman is passive under the male gaze, which reinforces the patriarchal factor. Mulvey contends that there is an inherent power imbalance since the masculine gaze dominates the female gaze. One may argue that patriarchy, which has historically been ingrained in American culture and society, is to blame for the disparity in the distribution of female power in these contexts. The male gaze puts forward the assumption that women are objectified by others and women are aware of this to the point that this leads to their self-definition and identification.

Through an analysis and examination of the power structures found in patriarchal countries, feminism aims to induce a paradigm shift away from conceptions of patriarchy and change the way power is distributed, with males ruling and enjoying privileges that are not available to women. Women's existence rests on a discourse shaped by males in a country like the United States of America, which is predominately patriarchal. Traditionally, men have dominated these patriarchal civilizations, with women and other binary genders occupying more subservient roles. In a patriarchal society, the male gaze is hence powerful and controlling. Judith Butler explains why this is the case: "The very notion of "patriarchy" has threatened to becoming

a universalizing concept that overrides or reduces distinct articulations of gender asymmetry in different cultural contexts” (48).

In a patriarchal society, the construction of female identity and gender difference centers around the male gaze. The representations that are produced as a result of the gaze are products of popular culture. The gaze as a control mechanism is an important instrument in feminist theory in deconstructing patriarchal narratives. Laura Mulvey’s gaze theory which indicates a gaze that belongs to a subject that derives scopophilic pleasure from viewing the female object, offers a means for a critical feminist exposition of visual texts and an ideologizing of the gaze and its controlling power which were difficult to address precisely.

In popular culture, gender representations typically reproduce the hegemonic power dynamics between femininity and masculinity. Within a patriarchal society, depictions of the submissive feminine sexual identity are built upon the binary opposition of the pure, virginal woman and the whore or fallen woman. The female body as the focus of attention is a collective possession of the patriarchal system that gives rise to the masculine gaze. In America and other Western capitalist nations that uphold patriarchal ideologies, femininity is marketed as a product that women not being bearers of the look can never have control of.

The male gaze theory is not perfect as its foundational premise is that the gaze is only directed towards men and heterosexuals. The universalization of “male” and “female,” in particular, ignores other distinctions like those based on race, class, and culture, among many other elements that need to be taken into account when applying the gaze theory. Additionally, in order to properly understand how many identities in popular culture are formed, a more inclusive understanding of LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender) gazes is required. Still, a lot of the explanation for women's identities in visual media depends on the concept of the male gaze. “Today, this observation informs reading of nearly all visual media, despite the advances that Mulvey, among others, have noted in technologies

that have profoundly altered what can be packed into a second of screen time” (DeTora 5).

Chapter Three: Representation of Women in Fiction

This chapter critically analyses the claim made by gender theorists such as Judith Butler and Simone de Beauvoir that gender roles are socially constructed rather than inherent. This chapter examines the extent to which social discourse has influenced how women are portrayed in American fiction while taking into account the dominant cultural, social, and political factors. This chapter also evaluates the attempts to counter this discourse and determine whether any progress has been made in reshaping the discourse in favor of women. If women's identity and nature is framed within a social discourse what are the influencing forces within this discourse? Have gender roles changed as a result of the challenge to male dominance and patriarchy? The question of whether women are equally accountable for how they are viewed and represented in society and to what degree men are responsible for creating gender norms emerges.

There is without a doubt that women are portrayed abundantly in literature. But more often women are marginalised and are relegated to domestic matters and its ensuing problems. It has always been deemed that the place for women in society has been the private realm of the household and that a man occupies the more public sphere of society. Cynthia Griffin Wolff further concedes that in the twentieth century there have been exceptions to this representation of women but that the significant thing is not the exceptions but that “there are so few, and that this ‘feminine’ literature balances so insignificantly against that massive body of literature which is dominated by masculine dilemmas” (206). Women are seen as secondary to masculine problems and any relationship women have holds meaning only in the context of their relationship with men.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, new representations of women emerged in American culture, which prompted a recognition and a deeper comprehension of women and their social responsibilities. With the first wave of feminist Movement which officially

started in 1848 at the Seneca Falls Convention in New York, women were progressively distancing themselves from the roles that were imposed upon and expected of them; and were becoming more vocal in the public domain of society. Women had the capacity to be represented outside the domestic life and this necessitated their voices to be heard. The second wave of the Feminist Movement in the 1960's till the late 1980's, saw women coming out of their domestic shells proclaiming what they saw as their rightful place alongside that of their male counterpart. The release of Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) which tackled women's deep-seated dissatisfaction with the traditional roles that were thrust upon them by a patriarchal society, served as additional validation for the feminist movement. The third wave of the Feminist Movement included the race-related subjectivities of all women, whereas the second wave was primarily connected to the experiences of white middle-class women. This implied, in a way, a broader understanding of women and their place in society.

A critical comprehension of the nature and identity of women is necessary to comprehend how women are portrayed in popular culture. In *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir asserted that "one is not born, but rather becomes a woman" (23). The binary gender roles of female and male that are accepted by society are not natural; rather, they are the product of constructed discourse, according to Judith Butler in her work *Gender Trouble*.

In a world where significant changes have occurred and "new modes of behavior" are needed, *Gone with the Wind* addresses the issue of adopting gender norms. Mitchell seems to imply that traditional gender roles and behaviors that are forced on women are subverted to more masculine ones in order for them to survive when society subjects women to change. The implication being that feminine roles and qualities are not suited for survival. Scarlett O'Hara as the heroine of the novel goes against conventional norms of a stereotypical heroine that conforms to a more feminine narrative. Throughout the novel there is a continuous struggle between Scarlett's true

self and the societal expectations of a lady. But the social codes which she resists are the means of providing Scarlett her acceptance in society.

In the two decades that followed, the 1950s and 1960s, popular culture conveyed contradictory messages to American women following the end of World War II. While women portrayed in fiction and movies were challenging the stereotypes of the ideal housewife, women were still told that their proper place was at home, apart from their husbands. In *Where the Girls Are*, Susan J. Douglas states that, "These women and their bodies refused to be contained in the home or limited by the prevailing orthodoxy about appropriate female comportment" (50). Truman Capote's Holly Golightly from *Breakfast at Tiffany's* is one example of a lady who defied the conventional expectations of the traditional housewife.

According to Judith Butler, gender is performative and done intentionally. She states that gender is a "persistent and performative corporeal style, or "act," as it were, where "performative" denotes a dramatic and situational creation of meaning (190). Holly Golightly in *Breakfast at Tiffany's* consciously shapes her identity by her activities; she leaves her rural existence as a doctor's wife behind and moves to the city to become a socialite. Holly defies conventional norms as a single, independent woman in her mid-twenties who makes a profession soliciting men. She challenges patriarchal notions of women, rejecting typical feminine roles that characterize womanhood.

The Help is an example of race influencing gender identity or representation. Butler writes that "the very notion of "dialogue" is culturally specific and historically bound, and while one speaker may be confident that a conversation is taking place, another may be certain that it is not. The power relations that condition and limit dialogic possibilities need first to be interrogated" (Butler 20). The "power relations" of the primary characters in *The Help*, is that of mistress and servant, between the white women and the black women. This power imbalance causes disparities in women's identities and positions based on their skin color. Undoubtedly, black women confront not only gender discrimination, but also racial discrimination in a workplace

dominated by white women. Just as the slaves in *Gone with the Wind* experience discrimination not only for being women, but also for the color of their skin, black women in the 1960s though no longer slaves, still have to endure the same discrimination as the slaves. However, discrimination occurs at other levels as well. White women from lower social classes, such as Celia Rae Foote in *The Help*, endure the same discrimination as the coloured women from the white women and are publicly rejected by them.

In a society that celebrates sexual freedom which exemplifies the spirit of the second wave of feminism, men are marginalized into traditional male roles. *Sex and the City* appears to be critical of men who transgress societal boundaries of stereotypical feminine roles. In the stress upon female empowerment and through sexual freedom the men are portrayed as dysfunctional and inept.

The second wave of feminism enabled women to break free from conventional representations of women in popular culture, as they moved away from more traditional sexual roles. Despite this emancipation of sexuality and challenging typical ideas of femininity, patriarchal ideology continues to define and reinforce female sexuality. The women in *Sex and the City* are privileged and independent, and they are led to believe that they have the ability to influence their relationships. However, men continue to govern the world, and women must play into the male fantasies in order to attract them.

An examination of several women representing different eras of American history in fiction reveals that social discourse has a significant impact on gender identity and roles. Although America is regarded as one of the world's most progressive nations, gender roles are heavily influenced by a patriarchal society. A woman who rejects societally acceptable feminine roles is considered as an abnormality, or an aberrant. Despite what government legislation and the Feminist movement have done to further women's liberation by creating more forums for women to be heard, a liberated intelligent woman nevertheless faces numerous challenges and is frequently condemned for her choices. According to Cynthia Griffin Wolff,

“so long as she is liberated, a woman is presumed to have no interest in – no feeling for – children and mothering. This stereotype seems to presume (in an ironic acceptance of the Sentimental ethic) that intellect and mothering are incompatible” (Wolff 214).

Chapter Four: Representation of Women in Films

This chapter focuses on the representation of women in the adaptations of the selected texts into films, taking into consideration the extent of adaptation of the texts with such factors as the fidelity or infidelity of the films to the primary texts. It examines the issues of male dominance and male point of view in the Hollywood film industry that have conditioned the way women are represented on screen and in the process study issues of gender bias that may occur in the film adaptations.

Starting with how adaptation theory has deviated from the dichotomy of film and literature and in the direction and concentrated more on multidirectional ways in a transmedia context of interpreting the text; the focus is now more on what new form the adaptation has gained rather than what the text has lost through the process of adaptation. Film theorists like Linda Hutcheon and Robert Stam have recognized and acknowledged that the term adaptation implies a multi-layered application. Linda Hutcheon in her work *A Theory of Adaptation* explains this by stating,

First, seen as a *formal entity or product*, an adaptation is an announced and extensive transposition of a particular work or works.” (7) ...

“Second, as a process of creation, the act of adaptation always involves both (re-)interpretation and then (re-)creation; (8) ... “Third, seen from the perspective of its process of reception, adaptation is a form of intertextuality: we experience adaptations (as adaptations) as palimpsests through our memory of other works that resonate through repetition with variation. (8)

Moreover, an aspect of studying these adaptations involves examining the extent to which the films have furthered the image of the women portrayed in the original texts.

When it comes to representation of women in films, there is a disparity when compared to the representation of men. Not only are men represented more in numbers but men have more diverse roles while women generally have stereotyped roles. Women are reduced to roles that have meaning only in relation to others. Sharon Smith addresses this in her work “The Image of Women in Film: Some Suggestions for Future Research” when she says: “The role of a woman in a film almost always revolves around her physical attraction and the mating games she plays with the male characters. On the other hand a man is not shown purely in relation to the female characters, but in a wide variety of roles” (15).

Mulvey had stated in “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” (1975) that the female gaze is the same as the male gaze as it is conditioned by it. Therefore, this implies that a woman is conditioned to see things through the eyes of a man and will respond in many ways like her male counterpart. However, the two movie adaptations of the book *Sex and the City* of the same name seems to repudiate this presumption by appealing to a female dominated audience that seems to dismiss the more rigid and narrow female stereotypes of either the self-sacrificing woman or the femme fatale which had been persistent in popular culture before. The feminist ideology seems to take root here where the women have complete independence to assert their sexual rights and pleasures, claiming ownership of the narcissistic gaze and in a reversal of roles men become the sex objects. Power becomes synonymous with sexual conquest. Power dynamics is thus equated with sexual liberation. Betty Friedan raises the problem that arises saying, “But what happens when a woman bases her whole identity on her sexual role; when sex is necessary to make her ‘feel alive’? To state it quite simply, she puts impossible demands on her own body, her ‘female-ness,’ as well as on her husband and his ‘maleness’” (216).

Another aspect of female representation in films is the close connection to a consumer culture and commodification of female identity. Female representation and spectatorship in films can be seen as a form of cultural commodity and consumption. In *Star Gazing, Hollywood Cinema*

and *Female Spectatorship*, Jackie Stacey makes the observation: “Femininity is constructed within a very particular set of paradoxes within the discourses of consumption – the feminine subject being the object of cultural consumption” (189). The female identity becomes a site for commercial consumption where the female role model promotes goods for the female spectators to consume. The link between feminine representation and consumption is further explained by Stacey: “The female spectator is thus a consumer of idealized images of femininity on the screen, and is also invited to recognize herself in that commodified image which she may be able to recreate through the consumption of particular goods” (183). Holly Golightly in the film *Breakfast at Tiffany's* constructs for herself an identity in the midst of an exponentially growing consumer culture. For Holly, to be able to acquire the jewelry in Tiffany's signifies that one is one step closer to becoming valuable and relevant in society. Her identity is embedded in cultural consumption that is grounded in materialism. One of the important concepts of both the movies of *Sex and the City* which is an essential part of post feminism is the concept of a consumer culture. Consumption becomes a crucial means of constructing identity. Not only goods and services are consumed but the men in their lives are presented as brands and goods to be bought.

The representation of women in popular culture seems to conform to Karl Marx's theory of commodity fetishism where the obsession with material possessions is emphasized upon and success seems to be equated with consumption power. Dominic Strinati explains this fetish saying:

Money exemplifies how social relations between people can assume the fantastic form of a relation defined by a ‘thing’, that is money, and is the basic definition of the value of commodities for people in capitalistic societies. (1)

While women in general endure gender marginalization and being stereotyped on screen, black women must deal with racism and classism as well. The arrival of motion pictures in the 1890's further embedded the stereotyping of black people and the principles of racism clearly viewed on

the big screen. African American women are faced with being double minority – not only are they black but they are also women. Representations of black women in Hollywood films portray them as minorities in society. Black women's marginalization is reproduced through invisibility in different aspects of society and this is reflected too on the big screen. St. Jean and Feagin observe that: "contemporary black women are often misrepresented, mischaracterized, and misrecognized in public and private discourse" (5). *Gone with the Wind* and *The Help* are two films that portray black women as the mammy figure stereotype. The archetypical mammy figure has been dealt with differently in both the films, but both these films have evoked an ongoing critique on their stereotypical and marginalized characterization. The mammy figure as a black female trope is presented in both the films, approached with both similar and different perspectives.

The filmic representation of women of the studied texts in chapter two undergoes a change of mode of engagement, from capturing the reader's imagination to engaging the reader to an aural and visual story. This implies that interpretation of the text will undergo transformations. Linda Hutcheon noted that the adaptations of long novels into films have to go through a level of reduction to a certain degree as films have a limited time span in which to present their story. She observes: "On the contrary, a novel, in order to be dramatized, has to be distilled, reduced in size, and thus, inevitably, complexity" (36). The implicit representation of the women in the texts when translated into the adapted medium of the films are conditioned by the contextual interpretation. The functioning of the gaze in this visual medium generates what Robert Stam describes as a "plethora of possible readings," that can lead to a different interpretation of the text (57).

The representation of the women characters in the films are decidedly shaped and influenced by the act of looking as Teresa de Lauretis explains:

The woman is framed by the look of the camera as an icon, an image, made to be looked at by the spectator(s) as well as the male character(s), whose look most often relays the look of the audience.

But it is the male protagonist, the “bearer” of the spectator’s look, who also controls the events of the narrative, moving the plot forward. (99)

This implies that the gaze that controls the representation in films is male in nature, thus the adaptations will be comprehensively influenced by this male gaze. The extent to which the representations in the adaptations have been determined can be studied and explained by the functioning of the gaze. *Gone with the Wind* is decisively about a woman who challenges the stereotypical representation of the southern belle, yet the image of Scarlett in the film is still dictated by the male gaze. The male gaze dominates the spectacle at the very onset of the film through the image of the poster with Scarlett in submission to Rhett Butler, her neck and shoulder exposed to him.

Visual arts like films abound in symbols that validate certain messages. Symbolism in the form of clothes that are worn in the films can help to validate the presence and influence of the male gaze. Clothing becomes an important signifier of female representation under the male gaze. The impact of the gaze can be visually seen through the clothes of the actors in the film. “The costume expresses volumes to the audience before the actor speaks” (Villarreal 8). Clothes become a way of expressing and identifying gender traits as well. Instances where the male gaze dominates in *Gone with the Wind* can be seen in the clothes of the characters especially the women.

While there are without a doubt Hollywood films that challenge the conventional patriarchal beliefs and values, mainstream Hollywood film still adheres to representing woman in the stereotypical and traditional images of femininity that have been construed in a patriarchal society. The images of women on the screen are created for the objectification of the patriarchal gaze in order to attract the most audience. The cinematic images of the three main female characters Skeeter, Hilly Holbrook and Celia Foote in *The Help* define femininity that are male-hegemonic constructs that are perpetrated by a pre-dominantly patriarchal society and on the screen they are portrayed as being more attractive than how they are described in the book.

The rhetoric of main stream cinema still holds the concept that:

The narrative structure of traditional cinema establishes the male character as active and powerful: he is the agent around whom the dramatic action unfolds and the look gets organized. The female character is passive and powerless: she is the object of desire for the male character(s). (Smelik 491)

Chapter Five: Conclusion

This concluding chapter recapitulates the preceding chapters and highlights the final outcome of the thesis. The various components and factors that are responsible for the representation of women in American popular culture particularly in the selected novels and their adapted films have been examined.

Patriarchal societies are more inducive to giving men greater platform to express and present themselves than women, and this is reflected in their literature. Undoubtedly there is a plethora of women portrayals in literature, with a large number of stories being centered around women. However the problem lies in the portrayal of women and the stereotyping of women in traditional roles of the weaker sex. While there is an abundance of female roles in literature, women are marginalized into certain stereotypical roles that are shaped by patriarchal beliefs and notions. A common image of women in the patriarchal hegemony are the roles relegated to the household and family. Women have held secondary roles to men, and their relationships have been defined and held meaning only in the context of their relationship to men.

Although mainstream Hollywood films continue to conform to the traditional and clichéd notions of womanhood that have been constructed in a patriarchal culture, there are undoubtedly films that question the conventional patriarchal beliefs and ideals. To draw in the largest audience, the patriarchal gaze is objectified through the use of pictures of women on screen.

Undoubtedly a slew of female oriented films have been coming out of Hollywood. But if one takes the views of feminists like Clair Johnston and

Laura Mulvey into consideration where they proclaim that throughout the history of cinema, women have been mostly absent in films and the women that we see on screen are depictions and creations of women by men; that the women we see on screen are just images of women that are presented as what they are presented for men and thus are not real representations of women. How then can one measure the length of progress that women have made in asserting themselves on the screen? Have women come a long way or are they still bound by sexist ideology in a male-dominated world? This is appropriately summed up by Susan J. Douglas who states:

If you look for where the girls are today, you will find fragments of many of them in each of us. We remain shattered into so many pieces, some of them imprinted by femininity, others by feminism. But they don't fit into a coherent whole... We feel our insides to be in a constant state of roiling suspension, our identities as women always contingent. (294)

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