

FEMALE FRIENDSHIP FILMS:
A POST-FEMINIST EXAMINATION OF REPRESENTATIONS OF WOMEN IN THE
FASHION INDUSTRY

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This thesis focuses on three fashion industry themed female friendship films: *Pret-a-Porter/Ready to Wear* (1994) by Robert Altman, *The Devil Wears Prada* (2006) by David Frankel, and *The September Issue* (2009) by R.J. Cutler. Female interpersonal relationships are complex – women often work to motivate, encourage and transform one another but can just as easily use tactics like intimidation, manipulation, and exploitation in order to save their own jobs and reputations. Through the lens of post-feminist theory, this thesis examines significant female interpersonal relationships in each film to illustrate how femininity is constructed and driven by consumer culture in the fashion industry themed films.

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This thesis is dedicated to my first playmate, best friend, bodyguard, guardian angel, dreamcatcher,
teacher, academic adviser, mentor, bank, real hero and brother:

Dr. Cumhur Alper Geloğulları.

I will be eternally grateful to you for making my life wonderful. I love you my dear brother; without
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INTRODUCTION

This thesis focuses on three fashion industry themed female friendship films: *Pret-a-Porter/Ready to Wear* (1994) by Robert Altman, *The Devil Wears Prada* (2006) by David Frankel, and *The September Issue* (2009) by R.J. Cutler. Female interpersonal relationships are complex – women often work to motivate, encourage and transform one another but can just as easily use tactics like intimidation, manipulation, and exploitation in order to save their own jobs and reputations. Through the lens of post-feminist theory, this thesis will examine significant female interpersonal relationships in each film to illustrate how femininity is constructed and driven by consumer culture.

The first film that will be examined is Robert Altman's *Pret-a-Porter/Ready to Wear* (1994). Altman is known for his satire, mocking patriarchal systems of power, gender stereotypes, identity constructs, workplace politics, and ordinary individuals in everyday social situations. The film, a mockumentary, was shot during the Spring 1994 Paris Fashion Week and is based on fictional and real personalities from the fashion industry. Similar to his other films, Altman portrays women's complex relationships by using both fictional and real fashion platforms and personalities. This thesis will examine the three examples from the film: the relationship between a fictional fashion magazine editor and her assistant, a fictional fashion news reporter and her assistant, and the fictional female fashion designer and her models. By examining the relationships between these characters, crucial observations regarding their relationships, and the entire fashion, beauty and media industries in the film emerge. This film's narrative is an example of a post-feminist text.

The second film that will be examined is *The Devil Wears Prada* (2006) directed by David Frankel. Similar to *Pret-a-Porter/Ready to Wear*, there are significant elements of post-

feminism evident in the female characters' professional and social relationships. This fictional film is important for the thesis since it also provides examples of satirically constructed femininities in the contemporary fashion industry. The film is based on the bestselling novel of the same name written by Lauren Weisberger, who is *Vogue's* editor-in-chief Anna Wintour's former assistant. The book and film were inspired by Wintour, her professional and social relationships between her female assistants, and her impact on the fashion, beauty and media industries. Due to the films' narrative structure as an example of a post-feminist text, the main characters have fictional names and fictional stories even though these details reference and mock the real women who work in these industries.

The third and final film that will be analyzed is *The September Issue* (2009) directed by R.J. Cutler. It is a documentary that is often considered to be the real version of *The Devil Wears Prada*. Post-feminist sentiment is evident in the women's professional and social relationships in the film. This documentary can also be read as a female friendship film that is based on Anna Wintour, Grace Coddington, their co-workers, assistants and their professional and social relationships. Complementing the other films analyzed, *The September Issue* provides significant examples of the real life representations of women in a post-feminist world driven by a fashion, beauty, and media oriented consumer culture.

Because these three female friendship films offer a range of representations of contemporary professional women who hold positions of power in the fashion, beauty, media industries and consumer culture, analyses that compare and contrast these films may help in understanding post-feminist and homo-social female relationships. Each film utilizes different techniques and storylines, offering multiple ways to examine the settings and representations of gender in a modern world that is driven by a consumer culture manipulated and ruled by the

fashion, beauty and media industries. The films were made during two decades that represent the complexity of contemporary society and the contradictory ideologies of post-feminism driven by consumer culture. As these three films show, women continue to navigate politically and socially constrained ideologies while also attempting to construct their own feminine identities. Each film depicts the transformational power of fashion and beauty in female friendship films; however, the idea of transformation is complex since it can have positive, negative and ambiguous impacts on women. This thesis will use post-feminist theory to examine specific female friendships in these films, demonstrating how the main characters are reinforcing stereotypes and becoming the representatives (heroines and even victims) of consumer culture, media and the advertising, fashion and beauty industries.

LITERATURE REVIEW

As a theoretical framework, this thesis uses a post-feminist approach, which allows for a careful examination of how the fashion industry positively and negatively impacts female professional and social relationships in the three fashion themed films. Since the three films are about fashion – an industry driven by consumption – it is appropriate to use the lens of post-feminism, which encourages women to embrace their femininity and enjoy their traditional gender roles because they have already achieved success and equality in the workplace. Like the fashion industry, post-feminist culture encourages women to consume and both consider women to be independent and empowered, while simultaneously reinforcing these illusions.

As the three films are based on female professional and social relationships, post-feminism allows for an analysis of how working in the fashion industry impacts women's lives. The first two films' characters are fictional, but the last film is based on actual women who work in the contemporary fashion industry. Society may believe that fashion is all about clothing

styles and beauty products, but it extends beyond these two components. According to Kawamura, “Fashion is a system of institutions, organizations, groups, producers, events and practices, all of which contribute to the making of fashion, which is different from dress or clothing. It is a structural nature of the system that affects the legitimation process of designers’ creativity” (43). Female professional and social relationships are affected by both the ephemeral structure and harsh rules of the fashion industry and the competitive nature of the corporate world. For example, *Vogue* magazine perpetuates idealistic standards of femininity, specifically by setting weight expectations and allowing manufacturers, designers, and fashion magazine editors to dictate clothing styles. The magazine presents beautifully dressed women as being strong and empowered through their femininity; however, this empowerment is an illusion in real life. As posited by Tasker and Negra, post-feminist culture is all about constructing femininity through the fashion industry and magazines driven by consumerism. Thus, post-feminism also shapes women’s professional, emotional and physical behaviors and struggles since their conceptions of femininity have been constructed by the fashion industry.

Post-feminist theory plays a significant role in this thesis because it examines the fashion and beauty industries along with a popular culture driven by consumerism. Additionally, post-feminism informs this thesis because it is considered an illusion and a backlash of previous feminist movements. The three films depict the struggles that female characters face in a post-feminist world driven by fashion consumption, the expectations of patriarchal society, and the challenges of the corporate world. The fashion and beauty industries provide a perfect context in which to observe the ways that inequality between men and women still exist, and how women are treated by the fashion designers, merchandisers, beauty companies, marketers, advertisers and filmmakers. Gender inequality and post-feminism are driven by consumer culture and

manipulate women by creating gender politics and new feminine identities. Many fashion-oriented films illustrate these situations, and question the societies, political structures and economic systems that they represent. Nevertheless, it seems that few really question and analyze the media with a sustained scrutiny, motivated to invigorate the feminist movement. It seems that feminists often write for other feminists about the same problems, as they surface over and over again, mutating and developing as the result of cultural fluctuation.

Since post-feminism deals with popular culture, consumerism, media and society, these three films turn a critical eye toward this ideology. The films are examples of how post-feminism can be accepted as a critique of second wave feminism because they question binary thinking as it relates to sexuality, female relationships and biology. Additionally, they examine gender issues and women's positions in modern society, raising many questions about individuality, women's bodies and sexual desire. Since second wave feminists are often portrayed as pessimistic and aggressive women in media representations, post-feminism attempts to combat this image by infusing some appeals of feminism with optimism.

In her book *Gender Inequalities: Feminist Theories and Politics*, Judith Lorber describes feminism as “a social movement whose basic goal is equality between women and men. . . . As an organized movement, modern feminism rose in the nineteenth century in Europe, America and Japan in response to the great inequalities between the legal statuses of women and men citizens” (1). Feminism has developed through a long historical process, with every generation contributing to its development. In the 1940s and 1950s, feminists seemed to take a great deal of pride in their beliefs and did not mind being called feminists. However, feminism has changed since its early incarnation. Political, religious, and educational systems, as well as media and industry (particularly the fashion industry) have transformed feminism (even though it always

has been controversial and complex) into a controversial and complex topic. Today, due to the negative stigma that seems to be associated with the word, some people – both men and women - hesitate to call themselves “feminists.” They are quick to disassociate from the term, even though they are not aware of what being a feminist actually means, let alone the distinction between feminism and post-feminism. To illustrate the themes of post-feminism—the continual development of feminist ideals – one must address the common misunderstandings about feminism that create an aversion to the label.

Today, feminism is a very controversial phenomenon – some consider feminists’ work an example of progress towards gender equity; others are irritated by the threat of a ‘feminist agenda.’ It is important to understand why people react so differently to the same term since it speaks to larger aspects of society. Feminism has been used by millions of people from different professions in both positive and negative ways. When one looks at the history of feminism and its transformation over the years, she will see it is full of challenges, abuses, developments, and movements. Feminists during the first wave movement in the United States and Europe wanted equality in the political realm, specifically fighting for voting rights. These women made constant and persistent efforts to attain suffrage for women so that they and future generations would be able to express themselves in a male dominated society.

These early feminists soon realized that gaining voting rights was just one step towards advancing women’s equality. Capitalizing on the momentum of the woman’s suffrage movement, feminists began to push for rights in the workplace, fighting employers for pay equal to that of their male counterparts. But this achievement was not simple – yet again, women had to fight for these small victories with the hope that they would eventually lead to financial independence and the possibility that they may live in society without feeling secondary,

worthless, and insecure. The next generation of women continued the fight for rights into the 1960s, evolving the movement into what we call second wave feminism. Women encouraged each other, spoke up, and fought shoulder to shoulder with their female friends, embracing their femininity while also creating a pathway to independence for themselves as well as future generations. Women who fought during second wave feminism saw the effects of their labor in the closing gap in pay rate between men and women and other additional rights.

Nevertheless, their efforts and hard work were met with resistance from those who wanted to maintain the status quo of patriarchal society. From this backlash came the concept of post-feminism. According to Coppock and others, post-feminism is a current ideology that first appeared in the early 1990s. Some theorists claim that post-feminism exists concurrently with another feminist movement called third wave feminism, which is a continuation of second wave feminism. Therefore, feminism in all of its many forms, complexities and contradictions, is still alive and well, sparking sociological debates and feeding the subjects of contemporary female films. Gender and feminist scholars and those who consider themselves to be a part of the third wave movement think that feminism is still necessary because women still have not achieved a state of equity and freedom in patriarchal society. Additionally, third wave feminists embrace women who have different sexual orientations, fight for reproductive rights and policy making, combat the negative effects of pornography, are involved in efforts to raise awareness about sexual assault, reclaim derogatory terms, promote political awareness and leadership, and push for equality in the corporate world.

Nevertheless, contemporary academics, who focus on feminist movements, fashion systems and consumer culture, argue and challenge the common definition of post-feminism. As Angela McRobbie emphasizes, “Apart from a few men at the top, including manufacturers and

retailers, celebrity designers and magazine publishers, it [the fashion industry] is and has been a female sphere of production and consumption. For this reason alone fashion is a feminist issue” (41). While the earlier feminist movements were highly critical of the fashion and beauty industries’ abuse of women, in contrast, post-feminism’s ideology parallels a consumer culture that supports women’s physical and professional transformation by embracing traditional gender roles in patriarchal society.

In conclusion, this thesis will use post-feminist theory as its methodology to examine and analyze the three films, as well as try to answer the questions that post-feminism and the fashion industry themed films create in today’s society.

What is Post-feminism?

“The politics of feminism are quite obviously different for different generations, and post-feminists are produced in a very different cultural and political context than, say, second wave feminists. This generational divide situates the specific politics of post-feminism as a politics of contradiction and tension” (Banet-Weiser and Portwood-Stacer 260). Post-feminism is not the continuity of the second wave or third wave feminism. It is also the idea that feminism is no longer needed and women no longer need to “fight” for any rights because society has reached a state of gender equality. In that sense, post-feminism is a pushback against anyone who still wants to argue that gender inequality exists (i.e. there is a wage gap between men and women; women's bodies are continually regulated by legislation, etc). Although the contemporary feminist scholars have written books and articles on feminist movements and their relationship to post-feminism, confusion still exists, which necessitates further identification, examination, and exploration of these topics. Thus, it is important to define post-feminism and illustrate the ways that post-feminists view gender roles in modern society.

According to feminist critics and academics, such as Angela McRobbie and Susan Faludi, post-feminism is a backlash against second wave or traditional feminists, who are often characterized as aggressive man-haters. Post-feminists feel that early feminism and feminists degraded women by labeling them as victims. They argue that embracing a woman's femininity and sexuality is important for womanhood and call for a return to traditional gender roles. However, post-feminists also believe that women's empowerment through things such as sexual freedom and salary equality are important and valuable for femininity – they may even justifiably act in aggressive ways in order to succeed in the corporate world alongside their male peers and colleagues. Thus, post-feminism proposes that women build their careers (either ethically or unethically) while also embracing girl power, sexuality, maternity and traditional femininity and gender divisions. Drawing from Sarah Gamble and Judith Butler, Lazar defines post-feminism as such:

“(i) as critical of any definition of women as victims unable to control their own lives; (ii) as skewed in favor of liberal humanism, embracing a flexible ideology which can be adapted to suit individual needs and desires; and (iii) as implicitly heterosexist in orientation by always finding a space for men in the picture. Tensions between third and second wave feminist approaches to issues of emancipation, empowerment, and identity offer productive possibilities for advertisers.” (505-506)

In order to participate in the male-dominated business world or freely express their sexuality, post-feminists take advantage of the advancements fought for by traditional feminism and feminist movements. Contradictorily, while embracing historical feminist movements' gains for women, post-feminists emphasize that they do not identify as or call themselves feminists. For post-feminists, feminism is an old fashioned concept: uncompromising, negative, unnecessary

and destructive to women's function and place in societies. They believe that feminist movements and feminists have achieved their goals; therefore, there is no longer a need to fight for equal rights.

As previously mentioned, post-feminism is a backlash against second wave feminism. American journalist and author Susan Faludi argues in her book, *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women* that this started in the late 1980s, positing that feminist and liberation movements are the source of the gender issues and troubles. Faludi also argues that media has a powerful impact on the problems that women face; nevertheless, she claims that many of these problems are illusory and created by media without reliable evidence. (12). She mentions that during the 1990s, media had manipulated the ways in which feminism was seen as affecting women's relationship problems, divorce, infertility or lack of maternal desire, and mental and physical health problems. British scholar Angela McRobbie, drawing on Faludi's backlash theory, argues in her book *The Aftermath of Feminism: Gender, Culture and Social Change* that the contemporary society is obsessed with popular culture, consumerism and capitalist ideologies. For McRobbie, one of the most significant characteristics of post-feminism is its presumption that feminism is unnecessary and no longer needed. Therefore, post-feminism is an identity/ideology controlled mainly by mainstream media. She refutes this by pointing to the plethora of issues contemporary women currently face, such as gender inequality, the illusion of achievement in the area of women's rights, the objectification of women, victim blaming and the lack of professional assistance by the safety and health authorities when women are sexually assaulted. McRobbie thinks that the younger generations of women do not want to identify as feminists because feminism has lost its sparkle and appeal. McRobbie's thoughts on post-

feminist, consumer-driven constructions of femininity support this thesis's argument about the ways in which the fashion industry affects women.

One explanation for this distancing and disassociation from feminism is the negative portrayal of those who carry the flag of feminism. The contemporary individuals associate feminists with cliché images of unattractive hairy-legged women who burn bras and hate men. Young women then avoid labeling themselves feminists because of these stereotypical representations. Popular culture, consumerism, and capitalism – more specifically, the media's manipulation of these things – push young women into thinking that they must sexually objectify themselves in order to receive the attention and acceptance of men or succumb to the identity politics of domestication. Lazar claims that the post-feminism and its texts use specific “verbs [that are] all positive, denoting constructive, transformative actions (“make,” “shape,” “change, evolve, empower”); ownership (“have”); and volition (“decided”). Women are told that they are unstoppable. They can have or do or change anything they so desire, with sheer will power. It's entirely their call; nothing is impossible” (511). Therefore, by these standards, women are ideal consumers for governments, media authorities, beauty and fashion industries, women magazines, and domestic product companies that essentially support and perpetuate post-feminist ideals. Since this thesis focuses on filmic representations of female fashion magazine editors and their female assistants and colleagues, it is important to understand how women play a huge role in constructing post-feminist ideas about femininity and empowerment. Post-feminism is a battleground where all aspects of modern society are talking at once saying different/contradictory things. Similar to the other post ideologies, the central meaning of feminism has been lost in the discourse.

Angela McRobbie also notes that “whenever people examine post-feminism, they should also pay attention to neo-liberalism, an ideology that elevates individuality and creates a common identity for all women” (21). For instance, post-feminism and neo-liberalism implore women to focus on their individuality and disregard ethical values when purchasing expensive fashion and beauty products; meanwhile, there are still women who work in unhealthy environments and become victims of the luxury goods, cosmetics and fashion industry. “Power femininity is enunciated also in terms of women’s exercise of self-determination and agency, which constitute an important goal for feminists and postfeminists alike, albeit envisaged differently. Whereas for feminists women’s ability to take charge and act upon life choices is construed as a collective struggle, for postfeminists this is conceived more in individualistic terms” (Lazar 510). Thus, post-feminism is a dividing force that creates a culture of apathy and disrespect, both towards women from different socio-economic classes, as well as the early feminists who fought and sacrificed for the freedom and rights women embrace today. The fashion industry encourages consumption as a means to fit the contemporary feminine ideal, directly and indirectly causing women to feel dissatisfied with their bodies and also adding to class-based divisions. McRobbie’s observations are helpful to understand why and how individuals, especially women, feel irritated and have lost their interest in feminism. The negative cliché of the angry, man-hating feminist makes the watered down principles of mainstream media believe that feminism is not only divisive, but outdated and, therefore, no longer relevant. However, feminism is still necessary for a variety of reasons, specifically in regards to women who are victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, and face discrimination professionally, financially, racially, and emotionally. Therefore, those that think women have

achieved their goals and have no need to gain additional rights should be reminded of the importance of feminism.

In conclusion, post-feminism is a complex topic to which the contemporary gender scholars are attending. Some critics think that post-feminism is a theory that suggests feminism is dead and no longer needed; others claim that post-feminism is another type of feminist movement which needs further analysis. Drawing from Angela McRobbie, post-feminism is a branch of feminism that rejects all of the progress of second wave feminists; thus, post-feminism is an illusion, a backlash and absence of second wave feminism.

Fashion and Post-Feminism: A Literature Review

“Post-feminism boldly claims that women possess active political agency and subjectivity, yet the primary place in which this agency is recognized and legitimated is within individual consumption habits as well as within general consumer culture” (Banet-Weiser and Portwood-Stacer 260). Because movements and trends within fashion are driven by capitalism and consumer culture, the fashion industry is, by nature, ephemeral. Fashion, itself, is inspired by many different aspects of society – from politics to social movements. Murray describes

the fashion industry throughout the world is enormous. Probably more people are involved in the buying, selling, production and execution of apparel and related industries than in any other business in the world. Fashion is as basic as steel, automobiles or power generation. It keeps entire economies functioning and interacts and responds to emotional and financial needs of most people of the world. (Murray 1).

Along with consumerism, aesthetic trends fueled by the arts, philosophy, history, economics and social advancements are exaggerated, minimized, augmented and diminished in a metabolic process. Set against the backdrop of an ever-increasingly globalized community, all of this takes

place within a fiercely competitive structure where the bottom line is quite often the final mediator.

In the 1990s, feminists and academics began to question post-feminism. According to Tasker and Negra, “Post feminism broadly encompasses a set of assumptions, widely disseminated within popular media forms, having to do with the ‘pastness’ of feminism, whether that supposed pastness is merely noted, mourned, or celebrated...post feminism suggests a more complex relationship between culture, politics, and feminism than the more familiar framing concept of ‘backlash’ allows” (1). Fien Adriaens further elaborates, noting that “post-feminism is a new form of empowerment and independence, individual choice, (sexual) pleasure, consumer culture, fashion, hybridism, humor, and the renewed focus on the female body can be considered fundamental for this contemporary feminism” (politicsandculture.org). It is a new, critical way of understanding the changed relations between feminism, popular culture and femininity. Media discourses play a crucial role in the representation, evolution and development of this new feminism.

Post-feminism can be seen as a reaction against the perceived inadequacies and contradictions of second-wave feminism. Often misused, post-feminism generally refers to the belief that feminism has been successful in overcoming sexism, which directly opposes the third-wave goal of broadening the feminist struggle. The term has negative connotations for feminism in that it is often used to imply that feminism and feminist ideals and goals have been addressed—that cultural development in modern societies has moved on to more important topics. As the three films analyzed in this thesis show, the same problems that the first feminists attempted to solve not only continue to exist, but are rampant. First-, second-, and third-wave feminism, along with post-feminism, represent different temporal developmental stages of

feminism. The most important thing to note when discussing the distinctions between these terms and the increasing complexity of the subject matter is that the basic ideals of equity between the sexes is at the basis of all of them—feminism is still feminism, and it is still alive no matter what people call it.

The film *Working Girl* (1988), directed by Mike Nichols, is a classic and important fictional film that contextualizes working class women in the 1980s through depicting the daily lives of both professional and upper class women to those occupying lower class positions. This film is important for the thesis since it represents the female professional and social relationships in a post-feminist era driven by consumer culture. When the main character takes a new job, she experiences a plethora of transformations and heartbreaks. Similar to Andy in *The Devil Wears Prada*, the main character, Tess McGill transforms from colorful and flamboyant woman to a classy and elegant lady simply by changing the clothes she wears. Although an older film, *Working Girl* has many overlapping similarities to the three films this thesis analyzes, such as women's professional and social relationships, transformation through the corporate world, and fashion and beauty practices. Much like the other films, *Working Girl* reinforces the misconception that women cannot be friends or work together because they are always in ruthless competition, which both creates and reinforces the real-life negative stereotypes about professional women and their friendships.

Similar to *The Devil Wears Prada*, this film implies that naïve women can better themselves, their overall attitudes, and succeed by transforming their physical appearance, particularly by changing the way they dress and apply make-up. *Working Girl* also portrays successful professional women in the workforce who achieve their dream while reinforcing their normative femininity, pursuing a prince charming and enjoying sex. When Tess first meets her

new boss Katherine Parker, she is encouraged to get rid of her excessive bracelets and bangles, chandelier earrings, and shabby necklaces. Katherine quotes Coco Chanel, saying, “Dress shabbily and they notice the dress. Dress impeccably and they notice the woman.” Even though Katherine’s advice seems to come from a caring, compassionate and supportive place, it is communicated in a passive aggressive way. Katherine continues to offer style advice, which Tess takes to heart, believing that she is being mentored by a genuinely kind and honest person.

During the last half of the film, Katherine’s life goes from evil to miserable, while Tess becomes the innocent but empowered individual. The film itself can be read as a contemporary fairytale, where the naïve princess struggles, overcomes obstacles, and finally gets her castle. The wicked queen, on the other hand, loses her power, is ridiculed and humiliated by male-dominated businessmen, and ends up a single, loveless, and miserable woman. Nevertheless, the innocent female character is still saved by male professionals, who dehumanize the other woman. Therefore, it is significant to show it as an example since it is helpful to understand how post-feminism still exists and women are still victimized by the corporate world, fashion and beauty industries in patriarchal society.

How Fantasy Becomes Reality: Seeing Through Media Influence (2009), written by Karen Dill explores the impact that stories told via mass media have on our daily lives, the manipulative strategies of marketing companies and how and why we often try to ignore media influence. The book outlines the commonly held assumption that most people feel as though they are immune from the media’s influence on the formation of their personal opinions, attitudes and daily choices. The author looks to examples of racial stereotyping, women’s self-image formation via fashion models, social identity, domestic violence, gender stereotyping and presidential politics to support the argument that the media content we constantly consume has

significant ability to augment and diminish our perceptions and behaviors. *How Fantasy Becomes Reality* underscores the impact, both negative and positive, that media has on our existence, and promotes self-awareness and informed decision making concerning consumption. This book is an important source for justifying the ways in which the fashion industry, driven by capitalism, helps to construct femininity. In addition to being victimized by the industry, the female models, fashion magazine editors and their assistants in the three films examined in this thesis also victimize each other. They are females in positions of power who create and perpetuate consumer culture and strict beauty standards that oppress women. Thus, this book would help justify post-feminism and its parallelism to consumer culture.

In the very famous book *The Beauty Myth* (1991), Naomi Wolf examines how women, while legally and materially liberated from many obstacles, still must face society's subversive body image ideals dictated by the fashion and beauty industries. Her book, published in 1991, played an important role in third wave feminism and post-feminism and, in light of the current political climate regarding the regulation of women's bodies, has resurfaced as a pertinent text. The author claims that today's women are more confused, cynical, exhausted and frustrated compared to their mothers' and grandmothers' generations. They are more divided in their beliefs than were first wave and second wave feminists; some of them are even completely opposed to the term "feminist" and work to distance themselves from feminism and issues related to women's rights. After dealing with many obstacles and achieving certain successes during their youth, today's older women feel frustrated with society and the younger generation, who appear unaware and apathetic to any advancing cause.

The book discusses many issues and struggles that women have faced; unfortunately, because gender inequality still exists, it has remained a relevant source for scholars and activists.

Wolf's points of view also represent post-feminism and she been trying to wake women up for almost thirty years. In many ways, women are still up against the same obstacles as second wave feminists. For example, even though women have gained some financial power in society, they've become extreme consumerists who are manipulated and influenced by the media, which has lead to low self-esteem and self-confidence, problems with self-hatred, increased instances of eating disorders and plastic surgery. Fashion magazines are some of the biggest instigators of these problems – women feel trapped and deal with many obsessions in emotional and physical ways.

According to Wolf, contemporary women do not feel totally liberated – they are stuck in a poisoned world. She thinks that modern women are in the middle of a violent backlash against feminism, with the fashion and beauty industries being used as political weapons. During second wave feminism, women broke free from the fetters of domesticity and the feminine mystique and instead became trapped by the fashion and beauty myth. Therefore, women have never achieved pure freedom in many cases. The book considers the contemporary backlash dangerous and aggressive since the ideology of beauty is the last of the powerful old feminine ideologies remaining from the second wave. Myths about domesticity, passivity, motherhood and chastity no longer have the same influence over women. Ideal beauty standards have become the last means by which to control active feminist women, who are seen as social threat to patriarchal systems of power. Thus, these institutions try to subversively affect women through psychological tactics in media. The theories in this book will be used to support the thesis by illustrating how the fashion, beauty and media industries objectify and victimize women and criticizing how post-feminism rationalizations fool and manipulate so-called empowered women. In particular, this book will be used to support the chapter that analyzes the character portrayals

in *Pret-a-Porter/Ready to Wear*, and analyze Andy's and Emily's beauty transformations in *The Devil Wears Prada*.

In the book *Postfeminism: Cultural Texts and Theories* (2009), Stephanie Genz and Benjamin Brabon explain how post-feminism is full of contradictions – even its definition differs from scholar to scholar. The book offers a clear introduction and overview of other feminist books and articles, research, surveys, theories and contemporary debates on post-feminism and gender issues from a variety of points of view. According to the book, the term post-feminism emerged during the late twentieth century in plethora of contexts, from feminist scholarship to media and journalism, post-modern and neo-liberal rhetoric, to popular media and the political arena. Post-feminism's meaning depends on each individual, scholar, feminist group or media authority. Cultural studies scholars have tried to examine and find an exact definition for post-feminism, but they also recognized how complex and contradictory its many parts are – from conservative backlash to Girl Power, third wave feminism along with post-structuralist feminism and post-modernism.

Post-feminism has been associated with female characters in popular culture and media, such as Bridget Jones and the Spice Girls. In scholarly research and articles, post-feminism typically refers to the understanding of gender categories, men and women and identity constructions in discourses similar to post-modernism and post-colonialism. Much like other traditional changes and movements, post-feminism has been read as indicative of a post-traditional time period characterized by dramatic sociological, socio-psychological, social, cultural and political transformations. The authors also explain the semantic structure of the word “post-feminism” to define the term in a clear way so as to prevent any confusion. They mention the prefix “post” and its usage in academic contexts, and how they achieved “notoriety and

ferocity ever since it attached itself to the social and political phenomenon that is feminism” (Genz and Brabon 3). Thus, due to the complexity of this prefix, “post” created much confusion in the academic and daily usage of “post-feminism.” The authors have made an intentional decision to omit the hyphen when they use the term “post-feminism” so that they “avoid any predetermined readings of the term that imply a semantic rift between feminism, post-feminism, instantly casting the latter as a negation and sabotage of the former” (Genz and Brabon 3). By not hyphenating the word, the authors also attempt to establish post-feminism with a specific cultural separation that acknowledges its existence as a conceptual entity in its own right. The post-feminist theory in this book will be used to justify the thesis by examining women’s professional and social dilemmas through their simultaneous empowerment and victimization.

In the book *The Illusions of Post-Feminism: New Women, Old Myths* (2014), Vicki Coppock, Deena Hayden and Ingrid Richter define and examine how post-feminism started, developed and created significant impacts on today’s patriarchal society. Furthermore, the book provides historical background and a socio-cultural context for these changes. According to the authors, post-feminism can be seen everywhere in contemporary lifestyle which emphasizes old gender myths and strict roles between men and women. Similar to Angela McRobbie’s argument, this book also claims that post-feminism is an illusion, and a backlash of previous feminist movements. The authors do agree that contemporary women are not completely empowered and still need to fight in order to gain their full rights in society. This book will be a vital source for the thesis as it supports the argument regarding the illusion of equality that exists in post-feminist thought. In particular, it will be useful when examining the challenges and limitations the female characters face in the three films – the effects of past gender traditions, as well as the dilemma women face in balancing professional and social roles.

In their book *New Femininities: Postfeminism, Neoliberalism, and Subjectivity* (2011), Rosalind Gill and Christina Scharff collected essays that explore and examine the representation of gender through new feminine ideologies, identity politics, popular culture, consumerism, advertising, internet, film and media, class, race, immigration, and religion. Rosalind Gill is well known for her academic contribution to media and cultural studies, particularly regarding women and gender. Furthermore, this book provides a well-examined and detailed explanation of post-feminism and media representations of women, with arguments that support other contemporary theorists such as Angela McRobbie and Stephanie Genz. Since this thesis uses post-feminism as the central theory, *New Femininities: Postfeminism, Neoliberalism, and Subjectivity* will be instrumental when examining the ways in which the films' female characters are trapped by this ideology. Specifically, the chapter on post-feminism, beauty, advertising and consumer culture provides evidence supporting the notion that these fashion and beauty themed films are fed by post-feminist theory and its ideological politics. Hence, this book will play a crucial role in identifying how professional women's relationships are driven by post-feminism, gender inequality, and consumer culture.

The book *Modern Misogyny: Anti-Feminism in a Post-Feminist Era* (2014), written by Kristin J. Anderson, examines how post-feminism and anti-feminism affect contemporary women's and society's lifestyle and gender roles. Anderson is a social psychologist whose research focuses on how post-feminism and issues of and towards feminism affect human behaviors, and cause more inescapable cycles of sexism and misogyny. Using her research along with that of other scholars, Anderson argues that the depoliticization of feminist contributions and goals should be considered as opposition to the collective action of society. She examines the parallelism between consumerism and women's empowerment to justify how media, the

government, and the fashion and beauty industries create certain collective expectations and behaviors through advertising and consumer culture. As the typical post-feminist argument holds that “women’s material needs have mostly been met and that a feminist movement is no longer necessary” (20), Anderson posits, “the media helped undermine feminist objectives by placing the focus of women’s empowerment on self-transformation rather than social transformation” (21). She also points out that society applies white and heterosexual women’s values, expectations, behaviors and lifestyles to all women’s issues, regardless of one’s marginalized position. Thus, she is in agreement with other contemporary feminist, sociological and psychological research: there is still so much work to be done in order to achieve real gender and political equality, as well as financial and educational equality.

Angela McRobbie argues in her book *The Aftermath of Feminism* (2008), that the modern social and cultural landscape could be identified as post-feminist, a time period marked with “anti-feminist sentiment.” McRobbie wonders whether or not feminism is still a valuable and indispensable movement, asking if it is viewed as unnecessarily aggressive or redundant in modern societies. She posits that we are in the midst of a post-feminism ideological state – where there is a largely held societal belief that there is no longer a need for feminist activism because women have already gained equal rights. Gender equality is simply a delusion, symbolic and far from the reality. According to McRobbie, consumer culture uses feminist jargon in order to celebrate female power through the encouragement of consumerism. She calls this a double entanglement – where feminism is manipulated and abused by the media, fashion world, beauty and clothing companies. McRobbie claims that the values of feminism have been incorporated into popular culture, media and governmental policies. She supports her argument by using examples from fashion magazines and popular television programs and films such as, *Bridget*

Jones' Diary, and *Ten Years Younger*. She posits that the media's representation and obsession with middle class white people and hyper-femininity degrades feminism, and that the government's use of slogans like "freedom of choice" and "woman have made it" illustrate how women are seen as either possessions or laborers. McRobbie calls this the "post-feminism masquerade," a new manifestation of patriarchy and the heterosexual matrix. She states that the post-feminism masquerade also functions as a mechanism of exclusion, which helps to re-establish colonization by emphasizing white identity as the culturally dominant discourse.

To emphasize her arguments, Angela McRobbie focuses on the fashion and beauty industry, education and employment opportunities, sexuality and reproduction, and globalization. Success in these areas is supposedly proof of how women are empowered and capable of making their own lifestyle choices. Nonetheless, even though women have gained certain forms of equality, made advancements in education and have seen increases in job opportunities, the fashion and beauty industry reinforces white and patriarchal hegemony. These industries collaboratively re-establish racial discrimination by excluding women of color. McRobbie also takes Judith Butler's concept of illegible rage and criticizes how feminine melancholia has been merged with contemporary definitions of being a normal female. By claiming this, McRobbie points out how the fashion and beauty industries, specifically fashion magazines, create a new type of contemporary pathological woman who deals with her lack of self-esteem through eating disorders, addictions and multiple abuses. These female models, sad-faced and ultra-skinny, are labeled as gorgeous and normal in the fashion and beauty industry.

Angela McRobbie declares that a "movement of women" is crucial for the modern socio-economic system. To justify her claim, she analyzes make-over television shows in which women are transformed in order to fit the standards of today's consumer-oriented society, popular culture

expectations, and the unrealistic demands of the fashion industry. She examines the assumption of how contemporary social divisions are highly feminized. McRobbie argues that the make-over television programs represent women and their solidarity by regionally dividing them into northerners and southerners. These divisions are further shaped by “intra-female aggression” in a post-feminist world cluttered with bitchiness, competitiveness, and violence. She also sarcastically scolds those who think feminism is a dead, unpopular and unnecessary. Angela McRobbie’s academic research will be helpful in shaping this thesis’s main arguments about media, gender and the fashion industry through a post-feminist lens.

The book *Feminism at the Movies: Understanding Gender in Contemporary Popular Cinema* (2011), written by Hilary Radner and Rebecca Stringer, is a comprehensive collection of essays that examine contemporary films through the ever-changing gender roles in patriarchal society. The book takes a feminist approach to analyze contemporary chick flicks, indie films, action and horror films, etc. The authors explore how the dictated roles of gender (femininity, masculinity, motherhood, fatherhood) have impacted feminist ideas. The book includes a variety of topics, from political representations of women and men to issues of race and ethnicity, sexuality, violence through gender differences, depictions of professional women, and consumer culture. In addition, the book explores how consumer culture affects society and defines feminine roles, especially women’s financial and societal freedom, through chick flick films. This collection of essays will be helpful in justifying the arguments made in this thesis regarding the relationships, identity and family of female characters in each of the three films examined.

Interrogating Post-feminism: Gender and the Politics of Popular Culture (2007), co-edited by Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra, includes eleven essays by contemporary theorists that focus on contemporary media topics such as gender, sexuality, queerness, race, class,

counterculture, work and politics. Each essay contributes and analyzes the notion of post-feminism through consumerism and media-influenced Western culture. These arguments are accepted by the society as normal. This book is very significant to the justification of this thesis's central argument regarding post-feminism and its effects on the dynamics of women's professional and social relationships. In particular, the articles written by Tasker and Negra, Angela McRobbie, Suzanne Leonard, Martin Roberts, and Sadie Wearing will be beneficial in supporting the claims made about post-feminist representations in the three films. Since the book combines different points of view and analyses on post-feminism, it will be a reliable guide to examine the complex and contradictory scenes in each film.

Karen Hollinger's book, *In the Company of Women: Contemporary Female Friendship Films* (1998), examines many representations of female friendships through woman's film. Her book is the first work on variety of woman's films and, thus, plays an important role in feminist film studies. Hollinger states that "the origins of the woman's film lie in the sentimental melodramas of the 1930s and 1940s, and this genre's filmic representatives can be identified by three distinguishing characteristics: they are specifically directed to a female audience, their plots center on the actions and emotions of a female protagonist(s), and they deal with issues of particular interest to women" (2). After the 1980s, female friendship films became popular and dominated in the film market. Even though there are filmic examples of strong, independent female characters, mainstream films during this era most often portrayed women existing in the domestic realm. Thus, these details are all related to post-feminism as well as early third wave feminism. Hollinger and other feminist film theorists divide female friendship films into different categories since they are open to multiple interpretations. This thesis will use Hollinger's chapter, titled "Anti-female Friendship Films," in order to justify its argument on a

variety of specific points. In order to appeal to a wider demographic with varying viewpoints, many female friendship films are designed to carry elements of both conservative and progressive ideologies. Thus, these films can be seen as controversial and open to debate from different arguments of feminist movements. Devious female friendship films depict a destructive female relationship that satirizes the possibility of women forming the bonds of compassion and unity that characterized other female friendship portrayals. Actually, these films are just extensions of 1930s and 1940s female films, reinforcing stereotypical representations of woman and encouraging fear amongst women. Since these films focus on problems and conflicts between women, they make it difficult to understand certain issues related to women and their position in male dominated society. Thus, they even send mixed signals to the audience by calling upon the need for male characters to resolve conflicts and serious issues between women.

Another book, *In the Company of Women: Indirect Aggression Among Women: Why Do We Hurt Each Other and How to Stop* (2003), written by Pat Heim, Susan Murphy, and Susan K. Golant examines women's behaviors towards each other and explains important details from different angles. This book is not a Film and Media Studies text; instead, it can be categorized as a guidebook. However, it will be helpful to justify the relationships between the characters in the three films in which this thesis focuses. The writers define and describe the behaviors of women towards each other in the workforce. They help the readers see the plethora of aggressive behaviors and conflicts that exist, and suggest ways to build positive relationships through conscious minds. Certain promotions, leadership positions, achievements, awards and friendships often lead to personal problems and issues between women. Other factors, such as childhood history, teenage years, and one's relationship with her parents are also important to understand and identify the existence of such aggressive behaviors between women. These

aggressions lead to apathy, lower self-esteem, and even depression on women. Since the three films the thesis focuses on are set in the fashion and media industry, this book will help examine the psychological and sociological reasons behind women's behaviors towards each other in the workforce. Therefore, the book can be used to justify the thesis's arguments and specific points made about each character's behaviors and attitudes.

The academic journal *Singled Out: Postfeminism's 'New Woman' and the Dilemma of Having It All* (2010) written by Stephanie Genz focuses on how post-feminism created new female identities and problems with gender. Like other contemporary feminist theorists, Genz criticizes post-feminism and the burden women who "have it all" carry on their shoulders. The article analyzes modern chick flick films such as *The Brigitte Jones' Dairy* and characters like Ally McBeal through a post-feminist lens, claiming that today's women want to build their careers and become empowered, yet also want to maintain the expectations of patriarchal society. Genz claims that the rejection of traditional feminist movements and identities created a space for new post-feminist femininities to emerge; however, she also argues that modern women are trapped by these new ideologies and suffer to maintain unrealistic expectations. The themes (fashion, beauty, consumer culture, and independent women having to choose between their career and traditional gender roles) of the films she examines in her article are similar to those evaluated in this thesis, making it an important reference when making post-feminist arguments.

Laurence Bachmann's article *Female Friendships and Gender Transformation* (2014), explores how female friendships can transform women in both good and bad ways. It illustrates many examples of how women have certain prejudices towards each other and how these prejudices impact how their professional and social relationships develop. Bachmann claims that

in a patriarchal society, women are raised to be suspicious and distrustful of other women, which makes building positive connections difficult. For instance, women's harsh judgment and competitive nature can have detrimental effects on sensitive women; however, it can also work to motivate some women to perform better physically, emotionally and professionally. This article is very important for the thesis since the three films are based on female friendships, and how women's interactions can have positive, negative or even ambiguous effects on each other.

In conclusion, this thesis will use fashion as discourse and the post-feminist theory as its methodology by supporting its arguments and analysis of the three fashion industry themed films through the academic work had been done by the contemporary scholars mentioned throughout the literature review.

CHAPTER #1 – *PRET-A-PORTER / READY TO WEAR*

Prêt-à-Porter/Ready to Wear (1994), directed by Robert Altman, is a mockumentary – a combination of fiction and documentary – that captures the preparations of the Paris Fashion Week in Spring 1994. The film takes the audience behind the runway and introduces them to real and fictional fashion characters. The film is about the superior, ephemeral and consumerist nature of the fashion industry and its vivid characters as well as their professional and social relationships with each other. It weaves interconnected stories, set in the many different places (airports, city centers, fashion designers' studios, and entertainment centers) where the runway events and gala nights are held in Paris, France. It has a complicated narrative structure and a large cast which make the film a complex and contradictory study of the fashion world.

Similar to Altman's other films and his auteur signature on women's representations, *Prêt-à-Porter/Ready to Wear* is sarcastic toward and mocking of its female characters, particularly the female fashion professionals. For example, the female fashion magazine editors and the reporters are represented as inadequate but manipulative and abusive in order to maintain their power. It is a significant example of a female friendship film and a complex post-feminist text which illustrates elements of consumerism and patriarchy. Female friendship films include "complex mixtures of progressive and regressive elements" which can be found in the post-feminist text of *Pret-a-Porter/Ready to Wear* (Hollinger 246). The relationships are depicted as complex, competitive, and destructive yet also collaborative and transformational. The film aggressively mocks the fashion magazine editors and reporters for being liberated, superior and narcissistic, but at the same time acknowledges that, deep down, these people are often insecure and ignorant, which makes them dependent on each other. Thus, the film is a unique example of a post-feminist text about the victimization of post-feminist characters in the male dominated

fashion world. By drawing from post-feminist theory, this chapter focuses on how the mockumentary represents the professional and social relationships between three female fashion magazine editors (Sissy, Nina and Regina) and their assistants and colleagues; the female fashion designer Simone Lowenthal and her relationships with her female colleagues; and the fashion reporter Kitty Potter and her assistant Sophie Choiset.

All of these female characters are fictional. During the Paris Fashion Week, the three fashion magazine editors compete to sign a photography contract with Milo, the fictional photographer. The film portrays Milo as a misogynist – arrogant and outspoken, yet smart and aware of the politics of the fashion industry. He is an important character, symbolizing the patriarchy and the male dominated fashion world. Each fashion magazine editor, including Kitty, is bullied, victimized and exploited by Milo, yet they collaborate and build a close social relationship with each other to stand up for themselves. Kitty and Sophie are working for a television channel called FAD TV who continuously interviews famous fashion figures, both real and fictional. Sophie does all of the behind-the-scenes work while Kitty takes all of the credit in front of the camera. Nearly everyone in the fashion industry is aware of Kitty's incompetence, but Milo is the only one who says anything, claiming that media personalities take advantage of other people's insecurities. Simone Lowenthal is a female fashion designer who loses her lover Olivier de la Fontaine in a car accident. As the film progresses, Simone finds out about her dead partner's love affairs along with his unethical leadership in the fashion industry. Later in the film, she is betrayed by her own son, Jack, when he sells her company and brand to the Texas Boot Company. She remains decent and kind, but at the end of the Paris Fashion Week, she decides to send her models down the runway naked instead of exhibiting her new collection under someone else's authority. At the end of the film, Kitty is frustrated and exhausted by the

complex and profound messages of the fashion shows, as well as being professionally dependent on Sophie. She has an angry outburst and quits, leaving the microphone to Sophie. Kitty, along with the three fashion editors are significant example of post-feminist characters in a post-feminist script. Simone and Sophie are depicted as the only post-feminist heroines who stand up, use their minds, talents and knowledge instead of their sexuality, manipulation tactics and unethical leadership to succeed in the male dominated fashion industry. Even though each female character is represented as professionally and sexually liberated in the fashion industry, women are still mocked, belittled and insulted. Consequently, the film's narrative is a significant example of a female friendship film created as a post-feminist text with post-feminist female characters and post-feminist heroines.

Post-feminism is full of complexities and contradictions. As Shelly Budgeon explains, "Equality has been achieved. Postfeminist discourse focuses on female achievement, encouraging women to embark on projects of individualized self-definition and privatized self-expression exemplified in the celebration of lifestyle and consumption choices" (281). Post-feminism is a theory and a practice that began after second-wave feminism and holds "within itself the threat of backlash as well as the potential for innovation" (Genz 24). Also, considering the effects of second-wave feminism in patriarchal society, Genz goes further in her definition, stating that post-femininity "depict[s] the paradoxes of contemporary femininity" by referencing both "traditional narratives of feminine passivity" and the more "progressive scripts" of women's empowerment and liberation (17). Due to the mosaic structure of post-feminism as both conservative and liberal, post-femininity has elements of traditionalism and progressivism which bring "manifold layers" to the feminine experience (Genz 17).

Roger Ebert describes *Pret-a-Porter/Ready to Wear* as a “hate letter to the fashion industry” which emphasizes Altman’s condescending tone toward his representations of the insincere nature of fashion industry society, specifically the female fashion magazine editors and reporters (rogerebert.com). According to Crowe, the fashion industry “eats people up and spits them out in a way that sends shivers down your spine: no wonder so many of its former stars end up unhinged.” (245). The film’s representation of the industry as a whole is contradictory, including positive and negative examples of real and fictional female characters who are respected or ridiculed. Also, the film’s varied and flamboyant costumes, representative of the new “look,” reinforce the class difference, racism, sexism, and consumerism, especially for women, in the 1990s. At the same time, the film ridicules the trends and body image vulnerability of women in the fashion world. Pam Cook argues how fashion and gender politics can create pressure for and oppression of women by defining the fashion trends and clothes that can hide or reveal, but either way they expose our vulnerability. Fashion, which requires a style statement, compounds the problem. It is both self-expression and social pressure, compelling us to conform. Fashion dictates identity...Even worse, it is responsible for the oppression of women, who, enslaved by the need to appear attractive, find it difficult to think. Fashion is inimical to thought: it is irrational (Cook 43).

In the beginning of the film, the audience meets the FAD-TV reporter Kitty Potter and her assistant Sophie Choiset through interviews with the fictional and real fashion authorities. Kitty and Sophie, empowered professional women, work as a team, but their personalities are portrayed differently. Angela McRobbie states that the women who “engage with issues of consumption (e.g. fashion), but from the viewpoint of production, could be described as ‘materialist feminists’, while those who are associated with the politics of meaning and with the

world of texts and representations could be described as ‘cultural feminists’” (32). Kitty is a typical example of a post-feminist and a materialist feminist that embraces the constructed femininity and considers herself empowered through her media reputation. She is represented as the sexualized female professional who knows how to play the game in fashion reporting by using manipulative strategies that do not require her to have the intellectual background.

Nevertheless, her empowerment is an illusion: “women can succeed but only on men’s terms in a man’s world..., they can wear make-up and dress in stilettos, shirt skirts, shoulder-padded jackets or silk business suits because these are feminine and promote acceptable images of appearance which emphasize femininity” (Coppock et al. 181). Kitty’s costumes are trendy and fit for her job; she is skinny and physically more appealing than Sophie’s clothes, which provides the opportunity for her to be in front of the camera.

Rosalind Gill argues about the post-feminist texts by stating that “the patterned nature of the contradictions is what constitutes the sensibility, a sensibility in which notions of autonomy, choice and self-improvement sit side-by-side with surveillance, discipline and the vilification of those who make the ‘wrong’ ‘choices’ (e.g. become too fat, too thin or have the audacity or bad judgment to grow older)” (442). For instance, Sophie is a significant example of a cultural feminist who is smart and critical of the fashion industry and gender inequities. However, she is portrayed as the assistant who is physically unfit and sloppy looking, destined to remain behind the camera because of her physical inadequacies. Naomi Wolf explains that “women’s labor for beauty, and the evaluation of women as beauties rather than as workers, issue women each day with metaphors of the real economic injustices that apply to them in the workplace: selective benefits; favoritism in promotion; [and] no job security” (56). This negative and even misogynistic representation of Sophie is an example of how “misogynists have often reproached

intellectual women for ‘neglecting themselves;’ but they have also preached this doctrine to them: if you wish to be our equals, stop using make-up and nail-polish” (Beauvoir 682). The film points out that in order to be fully successful, a young woman must maintain “youth and beauty, then, the working woman are visible, but insecure, made to feel her qualities are not unique. But, without them, she is invisible—she falls, literally, out of the picture” (Wolf 34). Thus, even though post-feminist heroines like Sophie are represented as empowered, they are still victimized and considered to be inferior to men, proving that post-feminism is an illusion, “unsustainable and premature” (Coppock, Haydon and Richter 105). Therefore, contemporary professional women still need to work and fight for gender equality.

Throughout the film, Kitty Potter is portrayed as a famous fashion reporter on TV, but she has no clue about the fashion industry and its important authorities, the dynamics of fashion or its relationship to arts, history, and philosophy. She is entirely incompetent and dependent upon her assistant, Sophie, to provide information through scripted cards and whispers during each interview. These two characters have a professional relationship in which Sophie feeds facts about fashion to Kitty Potter, who then takes the total credit during television appearances. The film bolsters the male gaze and visual pleasure and “stereotypes women to fit the myth by flattening the feminine into beauty-without-intelligence or intelligence-without-beauty; women are allowed a mind or a body but not both” (Wolf 59). Kitty is older than Sophie, but physically more attractive and obviously has more professional connections because of her position as a fashion reporter. Nevertheless, she gained her power and position by using her beauty and sexuality in manipulative ways and using unethical means, such as pretending that she is an expert while using her assistant to do the job. Simone de Beauvoir articulates Sophie’s situation:

Woman first finds herself in a position of inferiority during her period of apprenticeship, a point already made with reference to the young girl, but which must now be dealt with more precisely. During her studies and in the first decisive years of her career, woman rarely uses her opportunities with simple directness, and thus she will often be handicapped later by a bad start (698).

For example, when Kitty Potter is in the Charles De Gaulle Airport for interviews with celebrities and fashion authorities, she does not even recognize these individuals. It is Sophie who whispers the name and specific biographical information about each person as well as prepares the big information boards for Kitty Potter before interviewing. Even though Sophie does all the work in the film, she keeps her decency towards her boss and remains silent and stays behind the camera to keep her job. Compared to Kitty, Sophie portrays a smart and intellectual young feminist who understands the specific and profound philosophical messages of fashion designers, skills that would make her highly competent in and suited for a fashion journalism career. Drawing from Karen Hollinger's theories, their relationship can be described as manipulative and Kitty pretends to be the "hardboiled career woman who sees the modern working woman's role as so demanding" that she does not see anything wrong with taking advantage of Sophie in order to maintain her career (213). Their relationship does not seem abusive or destructive in general, but Kitty takes advantage of her younger and smarter assistant by using her knowledge and strong networking skills. These fictional characters are used by the film to send a particular set of messages to the audience.

The film is a significant example of a post-feminist and contemporary female friendships film in its multifaceted representations of Kitty and Sophie's relationship. Hollinger states that "the female friendship film presents relationships between women as a source of strength that

helps them to cope with the problems they face in the larger society; manipulative female friendship portrayals blame all of women's problems on other women" (212). Although Kitty Potter gives her FAD-TV viewing audience the impression that she is a smart media figure, she actually is an insecure, unsuccessful, and even socially awkward person when not on camera. The film depicts Kitty as continuously reinforcing the constructed femininity embraced by the post-feminist ideology driven by consumerism and fashion politics. In contrast, Sophie is someone who is challenging the ideology and the constructed gender roles which bolster her as an outstanding post-feminist heroine. Tasker and Negra posit,

Post-feminism frequently imagines femininity as a state of vitality in opposition to the symbolically deathly social and economic fields of contemporary Western cultures, and the highest-profile forms of postfeminist femininity are empowered to recharge a culture defined by exhaustion, uncertainty, and moral ambiguity. Thus, the postfeminist heroine is vital, youthful, and playful while her opposite number, the 'bad' female professional, is repressive, deceptive, and deadly. (8-9).

Both women are career-oriented and empowered, which nonetheless, opens them to other types of social struggles women face in the fashion industry. Even though Kitty Potter portrays a respected, educated and independent woman on FAD-TV, the truth behind the camera is the complete opposite. People in the fashion industry, except the FAD-TV audience, know of her incompetence, but in order to be politically correct and diplomatic, they pretend not to notice the truth. This attitude symbolizes the contradictory structure of post-feminist ideology: people are aware of unethical leadership and the victimization of women in the fashion industry powered by consumer culture; however, no one confronts this cruel and unfair system. These examples of the misrepresentation of women in female friendship films related to fashion and consumerism

illustrate the hypocrisy of the patriarchal society and expose as an illusion of gender equality. Therefore, these scenes show how anti-feminist and anti-friendship motifs indirectly damage women's social positions. As the film continues, Sophie is one of two characters who keep their integrity and decency by performing a high quality job. The following paragraphs will highlight other female professionals in the film along with their friendship with each other.

Pret-a-Porter/Ready to Wear depicts a variety thematic female friendships, but more scenes are devoted to developing and representing anti-female friendships. Karen Hollinger speaks to this strategy,

The anti-female films attacks on female friendship are immersed in a text that seems determined to develop contradictory thematic possibilities, many of which are, in fact, female affirmative. In attempting to affirm women while at the same time attacking female bonding, the anti-female friendship film seems to self-destruct thematically. (219)

For example, the film violently objectifies and dehumanizes Nina, Regina and Sissy – the three female fashion magazine editors – by exploiting them sexually, mentally and emotionally. The ways in which the film portrays their competitive friendship and negotiation efforts with Milo reinforce the contradictory elements of a post-feminist text. For example, Milo symbolizes misogyny and the cruelty of a male dominated fashion industry that bullies, belittles, exploits, objectifies, and consumes women. According to Jean Kilbourne, “Turning a human being into a thing, an object, is almost always the first step towards justifying violence against that person... This step has already been taken with women. The violence, the abuse, is partly the chilling but logical result of the objectification” (278). The film sends a complex, dual-sided message about the editors: they are both the victims of a misogynistic fashion photographer and, at the same time, are complicit of causing their own victimization.

Drawing from Orr, post-feminist texts “assume that the women’s movement took care of oppressive institutions, and that now it is up to individual women to make personal choices that simply reinforce those fundamental societal changes” (34). For instance, Nina is the middle-aged woman, portrayed as arrogant and capricious, yet ignorant about fashion. She visits Milo’s room, using her sexuality to seduce him and get him to sign the photography contract to work with her magazine. Because Milo exploits her by taking her naked photos and threatens to damage her reputation, she is ridiculed and labeled an incompetent professional. Similar to Nina, Regina is depicted as ignorant about fashion and incompetent during interviews with fashion reporters. Moreover, Regina is the elderly editor who is dwarfish and, compared to the portrayals of Nina and Sissy, unattractive. When she asks Milo to sign the contract with her magazine, he orders her get on her hands and knees in front of him. This scene illustrates the unethical and insolent exploitation of disabled and older women who are also victimized by the fashion industry. Even though she is editor-in-chief of a prestigious fashion magazine, Regina is still susceptible to the dehumanizing aspects of body shaming in the fashion world.

In post-feminist texts, there is a “tendency to dichotomize women’s sexuality into images of Madonna/whore, good/bad, passive/unchaste. A double standard of morality is evident as women’s sexuality is regulated through male definitions of the legitimacy of particular expressions of that sexuality” (Coppock et al. 120). For instance, when Milo visits Sissy Wanamaker in her hotel room, Sissy and Vivienne seem nervous about getting him to sign the photo project contract. Both women are represented as insincere and manipulative, collaboratively using their sexuality in order to maintain their position of power in the fashion magazine. Drawing from Margaret Gallagher, Coppock et al. argue that “underlying most media images of women are the dichotomous definitions of ‘woman as virgin’ or ‘woman as whore’ –

‘good’ women or ‘bad’ women...The ‘whore’ image is also diverse, but connections with dangerousness, insensitivity and unscrupulousness predominate” (110). The film uses a condescending tone to depict Sissy and Vivienne as hyper-sexualized and whore-like women. For example, Sissy acts superior towards Milo by mentioning her authority and power as a famous fashion magazine editor. While posing and showing her breasts, Sissy says, “Oh, Milo, you are driving me insane. I’m acting like a teenager, for God’s sake...I want you to sign the contract, and I want you. So, take me!” Milo is the sadistic male who takes advantage of her vulnerability by snapping photos, thereby flipping the power dynamic of their relationship. After Milo takes the exploitative photographs of Sissy, she has a nervous breakdown and screams hysterically. She calls her assistant Vivienne to come and rescue her, a scene representative of Sissy’s typical behavior – when in trouble; she depends on her assistant to save her. Even though she exploits Vivienne from time to time, the film emphasizes that Sissy would not be able to function without her support and performance. At the end, both of them suffer because of a man’s (Milo’s) authority and abuse. Therefore, the scene and the characters still reinforce the influence of the patriarchy and the indirect existence of second wave feminism – women’s empowerment is secondary compared to men’s and there is still much to achieve in regard to equity.

Pret-a-Porter/Ready to Wear attempts to emphasize “the crucial importance of female friendship in women’s lives, it does not idealize female bonding; instead, it portrays realistically troubled relationship that is hindered by both women’s internalization of societal conceptions of appropriate female behavior” (Hollinger 55). When all three of the fashion magazine editors recognize the situation, they decide to collaborate with each other in order to intercept the photo negatives before Milo publishes them and destroys their reputations. Due to a struggle with a

common enemy, these female characters move from anti-female friendship to sentimental friendship and sisterhood with girl power. Thus, the challenge, cruelty and exploitation they experience (even though each of them are partly to blame for the situation in which they find themselves) plays a transformational role in changing their attitudes towards each other. They were able to align, working together in a strategic female friendship, in order to save their professional reputation in the fashion and media industry. When they are threatened by the same exploitative misogynist and share a fear of public humiliation, they unite forces, which lead them to recognize that women can create harmony rather than chaos.

Simone Lowenthal is the only female fashion designer who accepts and celebrates all women's bodies – thin or chubby, young or old – regardless of race or skin color. Thus, she contradicts the post-feminist beauty and fashion ideals by challenging the constructed femininity. The film portrays her as the awakened, post-feminist heroine, who recognizes her strength and power after her lover Olivier de la Fontaine's death, and embraces her independence, solitude and power. Her male colleagues and acquaintances constantly remind her of her freedom and power and how she chose happiness and solitude over her deceased and hated lover, Olivier de la Fontaine. Also, she is recognized, respected and liked by her colleagues and the fashion industry, especially by the young models who feel comfortable and accepted by her sincerity, compassion and wisdom. The film portrays her as a positive female figure who embraces the feminine body and mind through ethical fashion production, as well as compassionate human interactions. Therefore, she represents the positive face of the fashion industry by standing up for herself and her female colleagues.

Nonetheless, Simone Lowenthal falls victim to the effects of patriarchy, the absence of second wave feminism and the controversial illusions of post-feminism. In the mockumentary,

she is portrayed as a woman empowered after her lover's death and, in spite of the many obstacles she faces from the men in her life, she is successful because she chooses to be persistent and professional. Angela McRobbie claims, "Elements of feminism have been taken into account, and have been absolutely incorporated into political and institutional life. Drawing on a vocabulary that includes words like 'empowerment' and 'choice,' these elements are then converted into a much more individualistic discourse, and they are deployed in this new guise" (1). In this way, the film represents Simone Lowenthal's professional and personal situations via harsh dilemmas – she is stuck in a cycle that will not allow her to both re-create herself and help the women around her. However, she is a key character in the film's ending where this cycle ends through a plethora of positive feminist messages. The three fashion magazine editors as protagonists achieve a sense of control and consciousness that are combined with female friendship dynamics and collaboration through the feminist values. *Pret-a-Porter/Ready to Wear* stresses the contradictions of post-feminism through the absence of second-wave feminism, the importance of the existence of ongoing feminist movements, the harsh divisions rooted by misogynist male dominance, objectification and victimization of women through damaging social order.

The ending scene of *Pret-a-Porter/Ready to Wear* is iconic: gathering all the female characters together for fashion designer Simone Lowenthal final fashion show. Tasker and Negra suggest, "Feminism challenges us to critique relations of power, to imagine the world as other than it is, to conceive of different patterns of work, life, and leisure. Post-feminist culture enacts fantasies of regeneration and transformation that also speak to a desire for change" (22). Although Lowenthal's design firm goes bankrupt and her brand is bought by a Texas-based shoemaker, she still keeps her self-respect even amid her disappointment with her son. Instead of

presenting another person's designs and clothing, she instructs her models to walk down the catwalk totally naked in order to break the cycle in which women are trapped. Stella Bruzzi explains this symbolic ending:

Simone Lowenthal's show, in which her models walk naked rather than dressed along the catwalk; the ultimate invalidation of fashion. As the same crowd which has attended all the previous shows rise to their feet in admiration, the obvious allusion is to 'The Emperor's New Clothes,' and the film's target the complacency of people who simply value something because someone else does. (33).

Simone Lowenthal describes her new collection as a new look for women: "This is Simone Lowenthal. The collection you are about to see presents two decades of an emerging vision. For me, it is the closing of a circle and the beginning of something new. New."

The runway performance portrays how women professionally and socially can unite, embrace their femininity in harmony, support and transform each other through different phases of womanhood. As Bachmann suggests, "Some women who are more disposed towards emancipation than their friends act as the voice of conscience on these questions, making the others aware of their gender conventionalism and urging them to modify some aspects of their behavior" (175). For instance, pregnancy is considered negative and useless for the majority of fashion designers in the film; however, Simone Lowenthal's attitude is very inclusive and supportive of each woman in her sector – she embraces even the pregnant model. She contradicts and challenges the fashion industry which is fueled by male dominated consumer culture. Her character remembers and reminds the audience that every stage of womanhood is special and deserves to be respected and treated with dignity. At the end of the runway scene, Simone Lowenthal and her models gather and look through the window. It is as if Lowenthal is trying to

wake up these women, challenge the fashion industry authorities and socially constructed feminine ideologies, and show these young female models how their mothers fought for recognition and change. She wants them to become more aware of the struggles women faced and still face and stand up, self-empowered, against misogyny and the false hope of post-feminism. Her actions symbolize the progressive steps of feminist values, women's sense of self-esteem and self-worth, personal development and autonomy. They also work to critique the patriarchy, the male dominated workforce, and women's attempts to find freedom and identity within the consumer culture dominated by patriarchal values. Sultze declares that "the liberal feminist notion of empowerment and change through equal opportunities, equal employment, and equal voice – but within the existing social structures and media systems – may not provide everything that is needed for a reformed, different vision of women" (169). By emphasizing the importance of post-feminist heroines like Sophie and Simone, *Pret-a-Porter/Ready to Wear* suggests that women in contemporary society need positive role models.

Sophie's news report at the end of the film could be seen as a symbol of the wise and educated women's empowerment. Much like Simone Lowenthal did in her show, Sophie stands up for herself and other fashion media reporters, criticizing the superficiality of the fashion industry by taking the microphone from Kitty. Additionally, she stands in opposition to the ignorance and insults directed towards women, decodes the profound message of Simone Lowenthal's show, and provides an image of a confident and respectable female reporter. Unlike Kitty, Sophie is not a female character who uses seduction or her sexuality while in front of the camera. Instead she stands firm, talks clearly and smiles confidently. She contradicts and challenges the fashion system and body politics driven by capitalist and consumer culture, patriarchy and the traditional gender roles. Nonetheless, the film still portrays her as being

unattractive since she does not fit the definition of femininity set by the fashion industry. For instance, she is not deemed physically or sexually attractive because she is overweight and unkempt (i.e. wearing an oversized blazer, having unpolished nails, wearing make-up and not styling her hair).

Hollinger states that “female friendship films offer substantially greater potential to the female audience for liberatory readings that challenge rather than support the patriarchal status quo” (246). For instance, when the runway show ends, Kitty, feeling overwhelmed by the naked expression of fashion, leaves the platform with her team. She is perplexed and does not understand the profundity of Simone Lowenthal’s rebellious philosophical message. This scene differs from previous scenes because Kitty Potter starts reporting the news without any assistance from Sophie. She picks up the microphone and angrily announces,

Is that fashion? I mean, is there a message out there? I mean, you got a lot of naked people wanderin' around here. I been forever trying to find out what this bullshit is all about, and you know what? I have had it! Goodbye. Sophie, you got yourself a career.

After Kitty Potter’s outrage, she hands the microphone to Sophie, and walks away. This scene also symbolizes the ignorance of those that represent the media. But that competitive and abusive environment can change: Kitty Potter has finally recognized Sophie’s integrity, diligence and knowledge. Kitty’s frustration and honesty with herself and her assistant transforms both of their careers for good. By handing over the microphone, Kitty has given Sophie her much deserved power in media and the fashion industry. Johnson claims that “one of the specific ways that post-feminism accomplishes the association of women’s interests with the establishment is through images of liberated and powerful women” (169). Therefore, the film presents a positive female friendship through Kitty and Sophie’s supportive relationship which helps elevate each woman

to her deserved professional position. Their strong interdependent mentor/mentee relationship mutually transforms and prepares them for better career and life opportunities.

When Sophie takes the microphone for the first time, she describes Simone Lowenthal's defile with deep understanding and astute analysis. This scene illustrates Sophie's celebration of her own knowledge and success. She describes Simone Lowenthal's show as:

...She has just shown us a celebration of fashion in the profoundest sense of the word.

She's made a choice that will influence all designers everywhere. And most of all, she has spoken to women the world over telling them not about what to wear but how to think about what they want and need from fashion."

The filmmaker chooses to end his film by drawing a parallel between Balenciaga's philosophy about fashion and consumers and the feminist fashion designer Simone Lowenthal. Her runway show symbolizes women's empowerment, where she and the models stand up for themselves and criticize patriarchal inequalities by taking off their dresses. She also stands up against the illusions and contradictory structure of post-feminism by rejecting the standards of femininity and consumerist behaviors. Instead of wearing someone else's brand (as her own brand had been sold to someone else by her son), she, like Balenciaga, prefers to stay naked and independent. Watson explains Balenciaga's philosophy: "He has a complete and utter disregard for public opinion, caring not a fig whether Press or customers like his collection, and because he follows no ideas or trends but his own, everyone follows him" (95). This scene indirectly points out that "Second wave feminism isn't dead, and a triumphant postfeminist world is still far from being imaginable, let alone a reality." (Gamble 51-52). Therefore, through Simone Lowenthal's character, *Pret-a-Porter/Ready to Wear* emphasizes women's struggle and the complexity of feminist movements. This final scene can also read as a closing of post-feminism and the

previous feminist movements and the opening of a new circle of solidarity, freedom and emotional and financial independence in women's lives. Hollinger claims that "female friendship films not only dramatize their female characters' shaping or reshaping of their sense of self they reach out to their audience to implicate them in female quest for self-development" (244). By reuniting female fashion industry employees, the film rejects the condescending attitudes and miserable representations of women in the fashion industry, sending a positive and motivational message to its contemporary female audience.

In conclusion, Robert Altman's mockumentary film *Pret-a-Porter/Ready to Wear* ends by celebrating female victory through ethical and meaningful fashion, female friendship, and feminist values. It is a fashion industry-themed film with a complex script that includes significant female friendship stories illustrating the complexity and contradictory structure of post-feminist ideology through an industry fueled by capitalism and patriarchy. As Coppock and others suggest, "The stronger the communication between women across structural boundaries, researching their own history and experiences, increasing the wealth and diversity of their own images, the more the lie of media neglect, stereotyping and misrepresentation will be exposed and challenged" (144). Driven by patriarchy and consumer culture, the film demonstrates how women's representations in the fashion industry "progress on a limited equivocal basis, with some steps forward and some steps back" (Hollinger 247). By depicting the struggles of the three fashion magazine editors, the fashion reporter and her assistant, and the fashion designer, the film affirms women's self-empowerment – these characters do not become victims of the fashion and patriarchy. However, post-feminist texts often portray female characters as empowered and liberated, while "at the same time idealized forms of their bodies are objectified, by various means, for male consumption and sexual delectation" (Gamble 117). Because of their

professional positions, Nina, Regina, Sissy and Kitty wield great power when it comes to making decisions, but the film also portrays them as manipulative and clueless about what is actually going on in their field. Each character lacks credibility, intellectualism and professionalism; nonetheless, they do not hesitate to act in arrogant, insolent and bossy ways. Since women still struggle and face abuse in the male dominated fashion industry, the film suggests women should stand up for themselves and continue the feminist movements. Even though the film insults women in a plethora of situations, it also encourages them to question what the patriarchy, fashion industry and consumer culture dictates in order to foster self-respect.

CHAPTER #2 – *THE DEVIL WEARS PRADA*

The film *The Devil Wears Prada* (2006), directed by David Frankel, is one of the most notorious fictional contemporary female friendships films that depicts the fashion industry, fashion journalism, female professional and homo-social relationships. The film is an adaptation of a book of the same title, written by Anna Wintour's former assistant Lauren Weisberger and published in 2003. The book, inspired by Weisberger's experiences working for *Vogue* magazine and written after she quit, was considered by some fashion magazine workers from *Vogue* to be revenge for the emotional burden Wintour caused her. Both the book and the film mock Anna Wintour and her reputation for being highly demanding, stubborn, and intimidating, all while remaining one of the most powerful and influential professional woman in the world. The tone of *The Devil Wears Prada* is similar to *Pret-a-Porter/Ready to Wear* in that it is a satirical and often hypercritical take on the fashion industry and fashion magazine editors. It is a significant example of post-feminist text representing women empowered through their careers yet still miserable in their social and romantic relationships.

The Devil Wears Prada is a female interpersonal relationship film with remarkable elements of post-feminist sentiment running throughout the narrative. The film itself reflects the complexity and contradiction of post-feminism by showing how contemporary women struggle in patriarchal society even though they seemed to have it all. The complexity of the post-feminist predicament is compounded by the influence of the fashion and beauty industries, who use multiple media channels to spread their messages and ideology, specifically targeting women and girls, but also influencing larger society by encouraging consumption and reinforcing gender roles and wage gaps. Even though they might serve to empower women and feminism in some ways, in reality these industries have a destructive impact on women.

Working from that assumption, this chapter teases out the various filmic portrayals of female characters' professional and social relationships by drawing on the academic work of contemporary feminist scholars. This thesis argues that the *The Devil Wears Prada* represents the friendships of women who work in the fashion industry in positive, negative and ambiguous ways, while also illustrating the effects of post-feminism on the behaviors and lifestyles of female characters. The film depicts female relationships and the ways women use power and authority to help them build strong careers; nevertheless, women who have advanced careers and strong professional reputations often suffer emotionally and socially due to weak friendships and romantic relationships. Regardless of the relationship problems and difficulties women face in *The Devil Wears Prada*, the film also illustrates how strong female relationships can help women transform each other professionally, emotionally and physically. Female friendships between Miranda Priestly, Andrea Sachs, Emily, Giselle and Lilly in the film are not just negative, abusive and manipulative. The film also includes complex representations of positive and ambiguous relationships and attitudes between women, all of which can be read through the lens of post-feminist theory. Therefore, *The Devil Wears Prada* is an important contemporary film to examine and understand how the fashion industry reinforces post-feminist ideology through constructed femininity and illusions about women's empowerment.

These developments and movements are specifically evident in Miranda's post-feminist character. She abuses her position of authority, falling into the stereotypical post-feminist portrayal of the professionally and physically transformed woman. As foils to Miranda, Andy and Emily represent the female assistants who try to keep their female boss calm and professionally satisfied in order to retain their jobs and their sanity. Because they fear the possibility of being blackmailed by Miranda, they are always concerned with maintaining their

reputations for future job applications. All in all, the film depicts the elements of female power relationships in the fashion and beauty industry by illustrating how women are both empowered and victimized by the same professional fields and consumer culture. Emily is depicted as a post-feminist character while Andy is the post-feminist heroine and both are victims of post-feminist ideology. All of the female characters in *The Devil Wears Prada* are modern, educated and empowered in their careers. However, they struggle in their social and family lives and, according to post-feminist thinking, are not truly considered independent, strong or nurturing. Even though they are portrayed as competitive and successful in their careers, they still are affected by the fashion industry's harsh body image expectations and are treated disrespectfully by their male coworkers. According to Stern, post-feminist ideology has complexities and it assumes that

second-wave feminist gains in the workplace and other realms have eliminated the need for organized political movement against sexism. As such, personal choices and struggles in the private and public spheres have taken center stage. Postfeminists may argue that women have carved an empowered space in the [fashion industry] landscape, but the recreation of the same stories of femininity and heterosexual love...continues to complicate feminist identities (168).

In the film, female characters hunger for love, sincerity and romantic companionship, as well as a work/life balance. By emphasizing how post-feminism creates illusions about and questions second wave feminism's achievements in gender equity, the film reveals the struggle contemporary women experience.

At her first meeting with Miranda, Andy presents her résumé. She has a journalism degree from a reputable university and an impressive writing portfolio. Her areas of interest

extend beyond the fashion industry – she is concerned with articles that have a critical social and political message – and it is clear that her desire is to work in journalism. She has very little knowledge of the fashion industry, but because she cannot find a position working for a newspaper, she accepts the job with *Runway* magazine and enters into the fashion world. As Kawamura states, “Articles about fashion are featured regularly in most national and local newspapers, as well as in magazines for women. Despite its high profile in the media, is not generally regarded as a topic serious enough to appear on the ‘real news’ pages. Fashion is a luxury and is considered trivial, frivolous and fun” (79). Moreover, fashion magazines “have a foolish and unnecessary commitment to avoiding serious or political issues” (McRobbie 43). In order to pay her rent, keep her romantic relationship alive, and gain job experience, Andy portrays a post-feminist victim who compromises her journalistic integrity to be an assistant to a powerful fashion magazine editor. This conundrum illustrates how recent female college graduates struggle to maintain economic independence, remain healthy and live a fulfilling life, all while attempting to build a positive reputation in hopes of eventually furthering their careers. Once again, the film reinforces the elements of post-feminism, proof that women’s complete empowerment and equality is an illusion. According to Angela McRobbie, post-feminism is a “kind of anti-feminism, which is reliant, paradoxically, on an assumption that feminism has been taken into account” (130). Female friendship films like *The Devil Wears Prada* call into question whether or not contemporary patriarchal society is aware that the work of the women’s liberation movement is not complete, and that feminism is still needed but requires more positive feminist and female representations in films.

In the interview scene, Miranda intimidatingly asks Andy, “What are you doing here?” Andy confidently introduces herself, telling Miranda about her successful achievements and also

about the difficulty she had integrating into the journalism industry in New York. Andy is different from her previous assistants – she has no idea about fashion and the dynamics of the industry, but is sincere, confident, professional, and aware of her potential for success. Her integrity, honesty and self-confidence impress Miranda. This scene is an important indication of how Miranda and Andy’s mentor/mentee relationship begins – Miranda is impressed with Andy’s passion for her career because she sees herself in the young journalist – but it also functions to set both women up as rivals for audience empathy. As Anderson states, “Career women, feminists, and other nontraditional subgroups are targets of envious stereotypes that portray them as competent but not warm” (129). Nevertheless, this scene emphasizes that even if intimidating female bosses seem harsh and monstrous, they still have compassion, and a willingness to teach and mentor their young peers. Women are often generalized, depicted as competitors and backstabbers in female friendship films that focus on professional women whose lives are transformed emotionally, physically and professionally. At the same time, their romantic relationships are non-existent or rocky, and they have difficulty communicating and maintaining positive relationships with their family members and female friends outside of work.

In post-feminist films, the “constant stereotyping and misrepresentation is [meant] to project an inaccurate and damaging view of women, providing the rationale for keeping us ‘in our place’” (Coppock et al. 106). For instance, the audience watches Andy and Miranda’s relationship evolve. During Paris Fashion Week events and business meetings, Andy continues to manage Miranda’s schedule and important business responsibilities. The night before the opening dinner, Andy goes to Miranda’s room to show her the draft version of *Runway* magazine. Miranda looks miserable she has just been served a divorce request from her husband, and she fears her twin daughters will be attacked by in the media. For the first time in the film,

Miranda is captured without make-up, with sloppy hair and red eyes from crying. This scene communicates a mixed message about professional women being miserable in their romantic lives. It is significant due to the contradictory structure of post-feminist texts: women are empowered at work, but this liberation causes emotional damage and burden in their personal lives. Consequently, Miranda is also depicted as the victim of this empowerment. Thus, her success is represented as an illusion and she is nothing without the love of her husband. Yvonne Tasker states that “in the contemporary women’s film, men, the institutions of heterosexuality and the family generate problems which female characters spend time talking over with each other and responding to” (165). Andy is empathetic to Miranda’s situation since her ambition for a career destroyed her relationship with her boyfriend. Their shared suffering due to collapsed romantic relationships brings them closer together. This scene reveals how two successful women develop empathy, compassion, and understanding for each other. Bachmann states that “same-sex friendships allow women to distance themselves physically from men, giving them temporary respite from head-on exposure to people associated with the dominant gender” (170). Miranda’s suffering saddens Andy because she witnesses her boss’s vulnerability, fear, loss and loneliness. Miranda recognizes Andy’s care and empathy towards her, since it is a major change of attitude. The significant of this scene is in its reinforcement of post-feminist ideologies. Miranda and Andy are intelligent, hardworking women with successful careers but also experience a plethora of obstacles in their personal and romantic lives. Even though they are professionally empowered, they are seen as miserable and unhappy because they do not have men in their lives. Nevertheless, the film assumes that women are incomplete without a heterosexual partner. Therefore, *The Devil Wears Prada* points out the harsh dilemma women face of having to choose between career empowerment or domestic lifestyles, further

highlighting women's ongoing struggle in patriarchal society. Post-feminism is an illusion and patriarchal gender roles still exist; thus, the film places indirect blame for women's unhappiness on feminism, which has inspired women to focus on their career ambitions instead of pursuing love and a traditional lifestyle.

In an important scene at the end of the film, Andy sees Miranda in front of the *Runway* office building; she stops and looks over at Miranda. Miranda also looks over and their eyes meet. Andy nods her head in thanks, in greeting, and in farewell. However, Miranda does not react – she simply gets into the car. For the first time, where no one but the audience can see her, she smiles. This scene implies that Miranda and Andy developed mutual respect and appreciation towards each other. Also, the scene is significant and iconic since it symbolizes the cathartic feelings that Miranda experiences through Andy's courage to break the cycle and set herself free. Thus, Miranda sees her youth in Andy, in the deep down she appreciates and admires her decision. As Bachmann emphasizes that same-sex relationships “can prompt women to consolidate their assertiveness and self-confidence” (171). These relationships have significant relevance to post-feminism since many women from different generations, classes, backgrounds, education levels, and professional fields experience similar challenges in patriarchal society. Even though contemporary women seem empowered and free, having achieved many rights and gained professional equality with men, in reality there is still much more work to be done. When speaking of post-feminist representations of professional women and their relationships with their colleagues, Anderson claims that “women who temper their agentic qualities with a declaration that they are ‘team players’ and are more interested in ‘helping others’ than ‘getting ahead’ can convey their competence and lessen the risk of backlash. But this is an additional burden for women leaders that men do not have, and it is another cost of modern misogyny”

(129). For instance, the ending scene communicates a mutual understanding between Miranda and Andy, illustrating how two strong women respect each other by succeeding in a male-dominated corporate world. Therefore, Miranda and Andy are aware of how difficult it is to build powerful professional reputations in today's business and fashion worlds while also maintaining their personal lives, romantic and social relationships, and securing their financial futures. All in all, this final scene sends a specific message to modern women who are living the post-feminism predicament – be aware of the absence of second wave feminism and conscious of the illusions that politicians, media, fashion and beauty industries promote.

Cultural theorist and scholar Alison Winch claims, “Female friendships are complex and formative in the production of feminine identities. As the psycho-sociological ethnographic research of a number of theorists demonstrates, meanness pervades many girls’ intimacies” (10). Along with similar contemporary female friendship films (e.g. *The Working Girl*, *Brigitte Jones Diary*, *Mean Girls*, *Sex and the City TV series*), *The Devil Wears Prada* has elements of both post-feminism and women’s anti-female friendships. “By focusing so strongly on conflicts between women, they obscure other issues related to women’s positions in society, relieve men of any responsibility for women’s problems, and suggest, instead, that women should grant men primary importance in their lives because they are the only ones upon whom women can rely” (207). Post-feminist representations of women are contradictory even when it comes to their professional relationship, which consequently allows fashion industry films to reinforce an unrealistic and constructed femininity. For example, in the opening scene of the film, Emily and Andy meet for Andy’s interview and start talking while walking to the *Runway* office. Based on her first impression of Andy’s appearance, Emily reacts to her in a negative and hostile manner. It is as if she is not fit for the legendary fashion magazine’s dress and beauty etiquette. Emily’s

conversational tone is condescending and she glares at Andy's inadequate clothing style with disgust. She starts bullying Andy from the first moment she enters the office. Judith MacIntosh states that "workplace bullying is a term for persistent and repeated offensive, unsafe, unwanted, or intimidating physical, psychological, or sexual behaviors or harassment that abuse power or control in the workplace" (762). Emily's frustration and sense of superiority is clear when Andy asks, "Who is Miranda?" Instead of answering her kindly, Emily chooses to further belittle and laugh at her, saying, "Oh my God, Andrea! I'll pretend that you didn't ask me this question! Miranda Priestly is the editor-in-chief of *Runway* magazine, not to mention a legend!" This scene illustrates how contemporary female friendships and women's professional relationships are shallow and insincere between colleagues. In anti-female friendship films, women are usually shown as bitter, bullying, and manipulative backstabbers toward each other. MacIntosh points out the "effects of the bullying are important because targets of workplace bullying are typically employees who are conscientious, are committed to excellence, do more than expected, and uphold standards" (762). Emily portrays a highly competitive post-feminist character who feels threatened by smart colleagues, so she manages her insecurity by acting in a superior manner and making verbal attacks.

In post-feminist texts, "The 'visual,' the significance of 'looking,' is of particular importance in defining femininity because, as already stated, a woman's character and status is invariably judged by her physical appearance" (Coppock et al. 111). During the era of second wave feminism, women were encouraged to experience and embrace their femininity and sexuality – fashion magazines published articles inviting them to try new sexual methods to experience pleasure. Magazines that focused on fashion, beauty and domesticity dictated rules and helped establish gender parameters that shaped women's positions in society. Women faced

strict and harsh repercussions if they did not meet these standards. Second wave feminists opposed this sexual discrimination; however, the next generation did not appear to have the passion to follow in their footsteps, which brought on the many contradictory questions of post-feminism. Today, “women are encouraged to believe that this pursuit of the feminine ideal is for themselves” (Coppock et al. 160). The fashion and beauty industries started using feminist messages in their marketing and advertisements, representing their products as helpful tools for women. Constructed femininity, as Winch posits, “is sold as a consumer choice and a form of self-definition that point up affluence and exclusivity. In an aggressive job market, the perfected girly self-leverages a competitive edge” (21). Even though these industries seemed to be supporting women’s professional and social freedom, they were indirectly exploiting women. For example, they combined feminist outcomes with female sexuality and consumer culture. As Jean Kilbourne emphasizes, “The advertising industry and the images of women has gotten worse.” (Still Killing Us Softly). Women are bombarded by media and messages telling them that, in order to be acceptable, they must abide by harsh and unrealistic beauty standards. Post-feminism is also used as a new form of misogyny, indirect abuse, and a manipulation strategy of so-called empowered women. “Exclusive fashion houses increasingly began to transform themselves into stores that sold everything that might make money... The brand became more important than style itself, and the hunt for the right logo supplanted good taste. Status symbols were coveted; quality was irrelevant. The magic formula for social climbers was ‘dress for success’” (Seeling 269). Even though women appear to be empowered and advancing in their professional careers in the fashion industry, there are still many gaps and traps into which women fall in patriarchal and consumer culture. Pam Cook states that “fashion is ambiguous – it can liberate or subjugate; but it is precisely this double-edged quality, its capacity to evade being

pinned down to any one meaning or function” that further complicates it (45). Nevertheless, society and the media continue to create supposedly strong female images (kick-ass fashionistas, go-get-girl, etc.). Examining the historic and societal changes that occurred because of women’s liberation movements, feminism, capitalism, politics, technology and media helps to understand why post-feminism is an illusion created by those in power in order to manipulate women. The film depicts each of these dynamics through its female friendships storylines and post-feminist elements. For example, Andy’s character graduates from a prestigious university, gets her first job, and tries to build a successful life while dealing with hostility from her female peers who have similar societal struggles. Each of the female employees – Miranda, Emily, Andy, and their coworkers – are expected to be feminine, sexually attractive and to choose between their careers or their romantic partners and families. These representations of women in the film are specific examples of post-feminism because they reinforce stereotypes about women and the indirectly blame feminist movements for women’s current societal situation.

Post-feminism is a confusing and controversial label that has created many divisions between feminists and anti-feminists. Contemporary feminists and academic scholars claim that today’s society is in an era of post-feminism, questioning whether feminism is dead or no longer necessary. Fashion magazines feed these ideologies by publishing destructive and manipulative articles and images. Contemporary women are surrounded by these magazines, living “in a culture that tells women to hate their bodies, and subjects female celebrities and women in the public eye to ‘nano-surveillance’” (Gill and Elias 182). For example, these publications claim that if women cannot maintain a certain dress size, look and style, they are somehow losers – incompetent creatures who do not understand the importance of embracing femininity, sexuality, and fashion – and should not be considered attractive. Consequently, post-feminism does not

allow contemporary women total freedom; rather, it is an ideology that is stuck in patriarchy and provides a useful tool for instigating and perpetuating gender politics and roles. *The Devil Wears Prada* depicts these struggles through each female character, mainly focusing on Andy and her journey throughout the film. When she starts working for *Runway* magazine, she has a confident, positive self-image, but in a short period of time, the values of this industry begin to affect her, making her feel self-conscious and insecure. Even though she is only a size six, she is made to feel fat, and becomes the victim of fat-shaming. Andy's strong educational background helps her maintain a realistic perspective and cope with these negative messages in order to advance her career, yet the film still depicts her as weak and vulnerable. Andy is portrayed as overwhelmed and affected, and this is particularly evident in the problems she experiences with her boyfriend. To the exclusion of her boyfriend and father, she starts living in a hyper-feminized world, filled with clothing items, luxury products, and an obsession with unrealistic ideas of beauty. Her new identity and workaholic behaviors isolate Andy from her boyfriend and her father. As post-feminism argues, women become more professionally powerful and sexually attractive, but suffer by losing the men in their lives through the collapse of stable relationships or marriages. Once again, *The Devil Wears Prada* tells audiences that the more feminist values women carry, the more miserable their lives become, eventually leading to emotional turmoil.

“Workplace bullying creates hostile work environments, affects mental and physical health, and has social, economic, and career implications” (MacIntosh 762). Through Andy's struggles adjusting to a new job and experiences constant bullying, the film illustrates how she eventually gains the acceptance and respect of Miranda, Emily and the people around her. After feeling confused about proper style and clothing choices, she is pushed to her breaking point and is ready to quit her job. She goes to Nigel and begs him to help her. As MacIntosh emphasizes,

“Workplace bullying affects both women’s intent to leave workplaces and their actual leaving” (762). Andy expresses her frustrations with Miranda, hoping to receive some empathy and support from him. Instead, Nigel gives her a wakeup call through realistic suggestions which also reinforce post-feminist contradictions. Nevertheless, he doesn’t push her away and starts helping her better understand the importance of the fashion and beauty industry, as well as its difficult and ephemeral environment. With Nigel’s guidance, assistance and mentorship, Andy transforms her physical look and receives the recognition of Miranda and Emily, other female colleagues and industry figures, which deepens her understanding of the ideology of the fashion industry. However, it takes a gay man, Nigel, to make this transformation possible, thereby reinforcing certain gender roles, and negative representations of female friendships. Andy develops a friendship and a mentor/mentee relationship with Nigel based on their experiences with isolation. For instance, Nigel tells Andy that he spent his youth lonely because of his gay identity. Andy can relate to him because she experiences isolation at work. Additionally, Andy doesn’t want to expose her insecurities to her female colleagues by asking for their advice and help with fashion. Instead, she goes to a member of the opposite sex who can understand her struggle. As Laurence Bachmann explains, “The process of creating and maintaining friendships between women is not always easy and is sometimes lengthy, especially [when women hold] a negative attitude towards women in general” (169). Emily justifies both her passive and overtly aggressive behavior toward Andy because she assumes that Miranda will fire Andy in a few weeks, thus, allowing her to remain Miranda’s most competent assistant. At the same time, Emily is aware of Miranda’s negative opinion of her, so it is not surprising that the bullied Emily projects her frustration and inferiority complex onto Andy. This is a typical intimidation tactic and power game that plays out between women in the workforce. Today’s corporate world is full of

competition and limited job opportunities – a dangerous combination that leaves people feeling threatened by one another.

According to Hollinger, “The manipulative female friendship films portray a destructive female relationship that mocks the possibility of women forming the bonds of loyalty and affection that characterize other female friendship portrayals” (207). As Andy notes in the film, when it comes to job competition, women start competing as early as their teenage years and it carries on into college. Contemporary women are programmed to believe that their hard-work and diligence are not enough to succeed. Lisa Ding explains this situation in the documentary film *Miss Representation*, “As a culture, women are brought up to be fundamentally insecure” (Miss Representation). All in all, young people are encouraged to learn about the existence of harsh competition and how to crush their competitors through either ethical or evil strategies—it is up to them since integrity is an individual choice. Competition leads to insecurity, which then creates more social and professional challenges for women it is depicted in the film. These insecurities may manifest as passive aggressive behaviors. But because these behaviors are all learned, it is possible to create and encourage the type of environment that would foster positive and constructive female friendships and professional relationships.

As Emily mentions during her conversations with Andy, she wants to be Miranda’s first and favorite assistant because she thinks it is the most prestigious job for a young woman. It is important to mention that this mantra – that million of girls would die to become the first assistant to Miranda Priestly – is repeated over and over throughout the film. Emily expresses her frustration in a satirical way by saying, “Andrea! *Runway* is a fashion magazine, so an interest in fashion is crucial.” McDowell notes, “Dress is servant and messenger to society. Whether speaking in whispers or shouts, it is always heeded because it presages a desire, a need, and an

imperative of society. Frequently, it articulates that need before other areas of life dare give it voice” (6). Emily also ridicules Andy for not knowing who Miranda Priestly is or the significance of *Runway* magazine. This scene is significant because it speaks to how hostile interactions between post-feminist women are represented in the film. The message communicated to women stresses the importance of maintaining the feminine ideal if they want to have a career.

When Miranda arrives at her office in the beginning of the film, her attitude is hostile towards Emily. She asks details about the job and hiring the new assistant. When Emily complains about the human resources office sending some assistants who are not fit for the job, Miranda responds aggressively to her by saying, “Details of your incompetence do not interest me.” After giving the daily orders to Emily, Miranda takes off her fur coat, notices Andy in front of her office and asks Emily who she is. Emily responds while smiling as she thinks it would please Miranda, “Oh, she is nobody. I mean human resources sent her, but I wanted to interview her before you since she seems hopeless.” Nonetheless, Miranda feels the need to remind and reinforce her authority, stating that she would interview Andrea since the previous assistants interviewed by Emily were completely inadequate. This scene emphasizes how professional women’s relationships are divided by hierarchy and status, age differences, and reputations. In *The Devil Wears Prada*, Miranda is the older woman, and she holds the power and authority even though all she does is delegate. Nevertheless, she is the only one who can make the final decisions, and, in order to keep their jobs, everyone stays silent so as to avoid offending her. She does not hesitate to insult Emily constantly, abusing her power because she realizes that Emily is vulnerable and powerless. Miranda knows that Emily depends on her in order to survive in the

fashion industry. Thus, their professional relationship and communication style are significant representations of manipulative and anti-female friendships.

The Devil Wears Prada emphasizes how the fashion and corporate systems work to indirectly encourage people to become the part of the consumer culture. Those who don't obey and follow the system are punished, professionally and socially. In this post-feminist culture, women feel as though they must adhere to these standards in order to be accepted into the corporate business culture. If a person in the fashion industry decides to reject this consumerist dogma, then their job and reputation are put in jeopardy. Women must either accept the rules and play the game, or pay the price. For example, in the scene when Miranda and her crew try to pick the most stylish and appropriate belt for a photo shoot, Andy is chastised for giggling and not understanding the importance of the choice. Andy's response disappoints Miranda and she begins to lecture her, attacking Andy's economic class, lack of knowledge about the politics of fashion, and ignorance of the function of the fashion industry, consumerism and society. This scene points out the power, competitiveness, and prestige of fashion magazines within the fashion industry and the larger society. Oftentimes, it is a small number of powerful individuals that make the decisions: "The elites who are in control generally share a common culture, and they mobilize formally and informally in the sense that they act together to defend their position, and use it to their own individual as well as institutional advantage. It is they who act as gatekeepers and construct the legitimate standard of aesthetics of appearance by taking advantage of Paris as their symbolic capital" (Kawamura 61).

Until Andy's fashion transformation, Emily and Serena bully her constantly about her lack of knowledge of the fashion industry, claiming that she wears ugly department store dresses and her grandmother's pleated skirt. Both are portrayed as empowered and beautiful women with

bully personalities in the fashion industry. Unfortunately, in post-feminist and women's friendship films, women's interactions are often depicted as cruel behavior and bitter arguments that sometimes lead to physical altercations. Many post-feminist films portray powerful female characters as either nasty bosses or sexy assistants while the naïve and smart women are consumed and drained by these two types of characters. Since female friendship and fashion films are fed by post-feminism and consumer culture, these types of negative representations are encouraged since they function as a way to force women to develop more competitive and aggressive behaviors. Thus, women, like Andy and Emily, become victims of objectification and humiliation by direct or indirect ways in post-feminist and professional female relationship films.

In preparation for Paris Fashion Week, Andy is trying to lose weight so that she will fit into the dresses provided for meetings. "Working-class women cross-class dressing share a delight in sequences of transformation, enacting visually as well as narratively a process of 'becoming something other' that is conducted through/over the star body. Typically represented through montage sequences that takes place, like the numbers in Hollywood musicals, in a space to one side of the narrative" (Tasker 27). As the film shows, Andy's wardrobe evolution through a plethora of chic and high-fashion clothes parallels her identity transformation as she becomes part of the fashion industry group. Andy feels trapped in post-feminist fashion society, sacrificing personal integrity in order to keep her job so that she is able to maintain her financial independence. Andy's physical and professional transformation sexualizes her – she becomes more attractive and diplomatic. When she recognizes the new look empowers her, she starts using this power to get things done and, more importantly, to please Miranda. She becomes a post-feminist: a woman who simultaneously builds her career and embraces her femininity, sexuality and freedom. Nevertheless, Andy is aware of the post-feminist trap: her physical and

professional empowerment will also bring emotional, personal and social problems. She struggles to find balance between her personal and professional lives, and is filled with self-doubt, anxiety and emotional turmoil. As Judith Mayne claims, “Being a working girl means understanding economics in sexual as well as business terms” (14). This magical formula helps female characters such as Andy appear to push against the glass ceiling, and achieve the most desired level of success. After seeing Andy’s physical transformation, Emily feels threatened and increases her bullying; however, she realizes that Andy is smart enough to learn the job and do it well. She also recognizes that Miranda treats Andy with more respect than she treats her.

Another recurring detail in the film is Miranda’s throwing of her coat and purse to Emily and Andy. This move can be read as a power game between the manipulative, iron-lady boss Miranda and her submissive, passive and fearful assistants – a gesture that is meant to insult and intimidate. This repetitive series of scenes reinforces the stereotypes of women who are in leadership positions. By throwing her coat, Miranda constantly reminds her assistants of the power she has over them, and she projects her anger and frustrations in order to create more intimidation and fear at work. Through these scenes, women’s anti-friendships are reinforced, and professional women are portrayed as negative, unreliable, evil and uncompromising characters. As the audience sees with Miranda and Emily, the more female characters are empowered in their careers, the more they become bitter, rude, egoistical and sadistic in their personal and social relationships, especially with other women. Meanwhile, the assistants and the women who hold the secondary positions are represented as sexy, slightly incompetent, bullies who manipulatively use their femininity and sexuality in order to get ahead. Thus, in this example of post-feminist text, women are represented as empowered, but also miserable losers. Indirectly, the film portrays women who have benefited from feminism as bitter, competitive and

somehow harmful towards each other and society. Therefore, the implication is that women should stick to traditional female gender roles and be the nurturers, caregivers and lovers that they are supposed to be.

Alison Winch states that “female friendships have the potential to generate negative feelings” between women (195). For example, after Andy’s professional and physical transformation, her friendship with Lily sours. She tries to nurture her friendship by sharing expensive purses, accessories and beauty supplies from the fashion companies, and Lily seems appreciative. Nevertheless, it seems that she is not really happy about her best friend’s accomplishments and transformation, appearing to be envious of Andy. “Behind the curtain of sisterhood [or female friendship] lies a myriad of emotional tangles that can wreak havoc in women’s relationships with each other” (Eichenbaum and Orbach 10-11). In the scene where Andy and Christian are talking in the art gallery, Lily sees them and becomes angry because she misinterprets their conversation, assuming that Andy is cheating on Nate. Lily’s transformation is the opposite of Andy in the film; she goes from a loving and caring best friend to an envious, insecure and verbally abusive woman. This kind of portrayal of women’s conflicts in their friendships and anti-friendships is common in post-feminist female friendship film like *The Devil Wears Prada*. The earliest feminist movements encouraged women to develop female social and professional support systems. Nonetheless, post-feminism devalues these feminist practices and methods of sisterhood. Even though post-feminism takes advantage of the feminist movements’ achievements in women’s rights, it still blames feminism for the destruction of women’s traditional social roles. To that end, many contemporary post-feminist films represent the complexity of female friendships and anti-friendships, holding that women may develop positive relationships while also being each other’s most dangerous enemies.

The film points out Andy's dilemma: she has gained success in her career, but at the expense of losing the love of her life, which reinforces the traditional idea of women's gender roles in patriarchal society. Moreover, she also experiences some challenges in the relationship with her father. In advancing her career, she no longer has enough time to spend with her father. Even though women may build successful careers and gain power, in post-feminist texts, they are still portrayed as somehow incompetent without men. The message communicated is simple: women may achieve success in their careers and build strong reputations, but their emotional satisfaction and strength can really only come from the men (father figures, boyfriends, husbands, etc.) in their lives. For example, Andrea's boyfriend makes fun of her transformation and ridicules her often. Andy feels stuck between her professional and personal life, and starts feeling guilty and frustrated by her relationship problems with Nate. Their relationship suffers after Andy gets stuck in a series of mandatory business meetings. This is an important post-feminist element in *The Devil Wears Prada*. Andy is supposedly empowered and transformed through her career, but because she chooses her career over her romantic relationship, her personal life is miserable.

The representation of female friendship is diverse and exists in a variety of intersecting factors (sociological, economical and familial). Women's relationships are complex, running the gamut from competitive to united, supportive to oppressive, compassionate to aggressive, loving to envious. Alison Winch points out

Women's sociality is harnessed as a way of naturalizing such an ideal body image, thereby ensuring that women are perpetually in service to the lifestyle industry's promise of everlasting youth. [Female friendships and intimacy] are exploited as a means of

marketing; they act as a system of mutual governance for the attainment of the ideal body, as women seek to prove their worth for the approbation of other women” (21).

In the scene where Nigel is helping Andy pick out a pair of high-heeled shoes, Miranda summons her but calls her by the wrong name. Andy runs into Miranda’s office, only to be scolded, “How many times do I need to call your name?” Andy talks back to her, responding, “Andy! My name is Andy. It is actually Andrea, but everybody calls me Andy.” At first, Miranda seems surprised by Andy’s boldness – she is irritated, but also appears to appreciate Andy’s assertiveness. Nonetheless, Miranda continues her never-ending list of demands, which is difficult for Andy to remember without taking notes. She insults Andy when she does not recognize the name of a famous photographer and she mocks her shoes. When Andy becomes intimidated by Miranda, she panics and feels self-conscious about her outfit. She even answers and obeys when Miranda insists on calling her Emily again. Miranda clearly abuses her power in order to belittle Andy, possibly because she considers her to be a future threat. This scene is significant since it brings attention to the way women communicate negatively in their professional and social relationships. While Miranda and Emily prefer belittling behaviors, glaring at Andy as if they are unimpressed by her clothes and accessories, Nigel, the gay male coworker, takes time to constructively point out areas that Andy can improve. This is an important detail that illustrates how women hesitate to communicate openly to help and transform each other in professional and social relationship films. It is also worth noting that Nigel is the only person who offers Andy assistance with her fashion transformation. Hence, the male colleague becomes the savior to the female protagonist, Andy. Even though Andy’s strength, intelligence and decisiveness impress Miranda, and she gives her a chance to learn and build a career, Miranda is reluctant to help Andy in this capacity, perhaps because she feels

threatened by a smart journalist who is much younger and more attractive than her. This scene includes various and simultaneous elements of power games (appreciation, irritation, humiliation, etc.); therefore, it can be analyzed as one of the ambiguous relationships between two women. As Miranda is intimidated and feared by many other female coworkers, Andy's daring gesture shakes her for a few seconds, angering her but also creating a deep admiration. Some readers and scholars may see this scene as simply negative or positive, but this chapter argues that it is ambiguous since it includes dual and complex elements. The ambiguity is significant because of this complexity, and the fact that the genuine help and kindness does not come from Miranda or Emily, but from Nigel.

In the scene when Emily and Serena are gossiping about Andy, the two of them exchange ugly and bitter words regarding Andy's lack of knowledge about beauty products and horrible sense of fashion. They represent merciless and evil female coworkers who see Andy as a hopeless woman. In actuality, both of them are portrayed as clueless and superficial when it comes to humanist interactions, deeper communication and friendship. When Andy enters the office wearing her new elegant outfit and glamorous Chanel boots, Emily and Serena are depicted as shocked. It is obvious neither of them were expecting Andy to be able to join the ranks of the fashionistas. Their reactions can be read as both positive and negative; therefore, this is another example of an ambiguous relationship between women. Serena shows her appreciation by saying that Andy looks good while Emily remains hostile by questioning whether her Chanel boots are authentic. Nevertheless, Andy's transformation threatens Emily, and her ambiguous attitude sends mixed signals—appreciation and fear at the same time. Her belittling behaviors read as envious, insecure and hostile even though she begins to appreciate and see Andy as a rising professional and fashionista. “The fashion system exerts a hegemony of meanings (a

dominant ideology) which are communicated around clothes that tells women how to appear as women... [They] are encouraged to aspire to the idealized body and the clothed image wrapped around it. In this sense, women become not only the consumers of clothes, but the consumers of the meaning and promise of idealized womanhood” (Guy et al. 6). Andy’s physical and professional transformation is structured by real fashion world examples like choosing a specific designers’ clothes, shoes and accessories, as well as the body language, communication style and attitude that comes with the performance. For example, the costume designer for *The Devil Wears Prada* chose to dress Andy in Chanel clothing since it carries significant symbolic meaning. Coco Chanel, with her “boyish appearance and active lifestyle, and her sharp tongue, she represented a welcome challenge to men who had grown used their own success” (Seeling 61). The individuality she showed and risk she took with her designs created a deep impact on society – she was recognized and respected – but it also somewhat alienated her from her peers. Consequently, Andy is represented as different, active, and a sharp communicator: a go-getter compared to her coworkers. Her character transformation moves from feminist to post-feminist and then to a post-feminist heroine. She impresses Emily and Giselle with her persistence to stay, learn, and grow professionally even though, in the beginning, she was in a totally awkward situation. Besides in their professional performance, women generally compete with each other and/or for the attention of men using their beauty, clothes and attractiveness. In this case, these women try to be seen as attractive by their female boss, Miranda, and satisfy her gaze for the sake of their job security and reputation in the media and fashion field. This significant detail shows that contemporary women are more worried about pleasing their female authorities or peers in the workplace than they are about appealing to their professional male counterparts.

Women choose clothing and accessories to impress other women and indirectly compete to remain powerful.

In the scene when Emily gives Andy instructions for leaving the book at Miranda's home, her initial communication is negative. She gets angry and increasingly frustrated after hearing that Miranda calls Andy by her formal name, Andrea. Nonetheless, she explains the instruction details carefully to help Andy. Emily and Andy show mixed behaviors towards each other, which creates a sense of ambiguity for the audience. Andy still keeps her integrity and respects Emily, but also starts competing with her. She even reminds Emily of her own words: "Miranda wants me to deliver the book, so I am not a total psycho!" Emily secretly admires and appreciates Andy's positive transformation, but at the same time she gets annoyed by how the naïve assistant has now become a threat to her job. Therefore, this scene also creates confusion for the audience – do Andy and Emily have a positive or negative relationship with each other? Or both? This scene also brings to question whether Emily and Andy really respect Miranda, or if they just obey her out of fear and for the sake of their job security. Their behaviors and intimidation of Miranda show that both women admire her power, but at the same time they dislike and even try to get rid of her. Both Emily and Andy are portrayed as unconsciously addicted to Miranda's presence, since she brings an intimidation, fear and anxiety similar to a mother figure or a goddess into their daily lives. Do they really respect Miranda and each other? These scenes represent female friendships and power dynamics in the workforce, where relationships are fluid and in a state of constant change and confusion. It also shows how post-feminism misleads and creates confusion in women, and they instead opt to use the power of their femininity, sexuality and careers, and drain each other instead of working together to attain true empowerment.

Conclusion

The Devil Wears Prada depicts aspects of women's professional and social relationships in the fashion industry, which is illustrative of the many larger and complex elements of post-feminism. Undoubtedly, the film points out the strengths, weaknesses, and ambiguous sides of female friendships in today's highly competitive and exploitative fashion industry, which is driven by patriarchy and consumer culture. The film represents Andy, a naïve but smart and educated post-feminist heroine who is able to overcome a plethora of complex requirements and conflicts in her first work experience. Miranda is portrayed as the nasty boss who manipulates people in order to retain power in her professional life, but ends up miserable in her social relationships. Emily is portrayed as a post-feminist character who is an insecure professional woman. Because she is constantly emotionally abused by Miranda, Emily projects her anger and revenge onto Andy in order to feel empowered. The film presents each woman as empowered and successful in the fashion industry while portraying them as miserable and conflicted in their shallow and insincere personal relationships.

CHAPTER #3 – THE SEPTEMBER ISSUE

The documentary film *The September Issue* (2009), directed by R.J. Cutler, takes the audience behind the scenes of the fashion industry by chronicling *Vogue* magazine's preparations for their September 2007 issue. Cutler captures the nine months that precede the release of this unique issue – at 840 pages, the largest in the magazine's history. The film is similar to *Ready to Wear/Pret-a-Porter* and *The Devil Wears Prada* in that all three depict female professional and social relationships in the fashion industry in a post-feminist culture driven by the desire to construct femininity through consumerism. Each of the films characterize fashion magazine editors, their assistants, and co-workers who collaboratively prepare fashion magazine issues and deal with each other in positive, negative and ambiguous ways. *The September Issue* is distinct due to its structure as a documentary that represents real people from the fashion industry and *Vogue* in a post-feminist culture ruled by capitalism. This film may even be considered the “real” version of *The Devil Wears Prada*. The tone of *The September Issue* is similar to the previously mentioned films – it is informative, amusing, and witty while also having uneasy, bitter, intense, egotistical, and acerbic elements. The documentary points out how female beauty standards and ideals are set by the fashion industry and magazines like *Vogue*. Moreover, these decisions essentially come down to one person, Anna Wintour, who is arguably the most influential fashion authority in the world. *The September Issue*, as a non-fictional film, is a significant example of a post-feminist text that depicts how the fashion and beauty industry helps to construct femininity and impacts the actual lives of contemporary women.

The film follows *Vogue*'s editor-in-chief Anna Wintour, the creative director Grace Coddington, and their colleagues and the models as they prepare the September 2007 issue. Wintour and Coddington share many similarities as well as differences: they are traditional and

modern, classical and creative, radical and eccentric. Through art, fashion, and photography, they have created a remarkable philosophy and representation of authenticity. However, their magazine's controversial images and articles have also had an arguably detrimental impact on women and the construction of feminine identity. This chapter focuses on how the documentary represents the professional and social relationships between Anna Wintour and Grace Coddington, as well as their relationships with their female colleagues during the preparations of the September 2007 issue. *The September Issue* is a significant example of a post-feminist narrative that reinforces how post-feminist ideology affects contemporary society through the fashion industry and the media.

Due to its structure and the way it is prepared and marketed, *Vogue* is a significant fashion and women magazine for post-feminist ideology and consumer culture. According to Budgeon and Currie, the problem with "many feminist readings of women's magazines [is] that they anticipate, and thus construct through the practice of their reading, oppressive interpretations. These readings fail to see that fashion and beautification represent one of the few arenas in which female desire can be legitimately expressed and also overlook the ways in which women actively transform or resist meanings from commercial texts" (174). In *The September Issue*, Anna Wintour and her team are depicted as post-feminist characters that encourage contemporary women to follow specific instructions to fit the demands of society and popular culture in order to transform themselves physically and professionally. Marjorie Ferguson argues,

Women's magazines set agendas of which topics are important or permissible, desirable or undesirable, worthy or unworthy of placing the female sex... Women's magazine editors truly act as gatekeepers of the female world. It is they, the high priestesses, who

decide what as well as when of social changes permitted to pass through the pearly gates of editorial discretion. (10)

Vogue is a powerful magazine in the fashion and beauty industry; moreover, it is prepared by female editors under Anna Wintour's leadership. It is a contemporary example of a post-feminist publication that has been

creating arresting images intended to make the reader's eye stop. These are images that evoke desire—for something as real as a dress or a lipstick, or as intangible as a whole new body language, attitude, or paradigm. These images of stately, introspective calm, or images that make the heart leap with an adrenaline charge of energy; images that reflect a century of change in fashion, society, and culture. (MacSweeney 8)

Thus, the editors of *Vogue* hold power over designers, companies and modern women since they shape gender identity (particularly female) and reinforce post-feminist characters through fashion and beauty products. Nevertheless, Grace Coddington's character is portrayed as a post-feminist hero since she contradicts constructed femininities through her interviews and the work she does for *Vogue*. Designers prepare their collections to show them on the runway during fashion weeks all around the world. September magazines are crucial for many business industries, including advertising, media, press, designer brands and seasonal clothes, factories and manufacturers. Because this large issue is so significant, most fashion magazines begin working on their September issue months before the release date. *Vogue* magazine happens to carry the highest value and prestige amongst all fashion magazines in the world. "Fashion magazine editors, like editors of technical journals, use jargon that is specific to their subject. Jargon of any kind is thus 'institutionalized.' *Vogue* is a primer of fashion language" (Borrelli 258). Therefore, the magazines published in September are post-feminist texts and highly institutionalized products

that have powerful impacts on society's consumption behaviors, political and economic ideologies, and the traditional gender codes regarding masculinity and femininity, as well as deeper psychological affects beyond clothing and beauty. Drawing from Gloria Steinem, Budgeon and Currie claim that "commercially produced women's magazines are necessarily devoid of 'serious' feminist content" (174). Driven by the consumerist and post-feminist culture, fashion magazines play an important role in patriarchal and capitalist society. As the film illustrates, Anna Wintour's *Vogue* reinforces femininity and the ideal feminine identity by promoting fashion and beauty industry products that encourage women to consume in order to maintain the ideal beauty. According to Borrelli,

Much attention has been given to fashion images—both advertising and editorial—by art and fashion historians, sociologists, analysts of the media, and feminists. All acknowledge the potency of the fashion image, but their conclusions have often been negative, focusing on the media's stereotypical portrayal of women. What is understood is that the layout, illustrations, and photographs of a magazine like *Vogue* successfully communicate fashion information colorfully, strikingly, quickly, to millions of women. (248)

Since *Vogue* is created by a team predominantly made up of women, the film represents how female points of view and the female gaze affect post-feminist ideology as well as post-feminist contradictions. For instance, even though Grace Coddington and her female co-workers create the pages of *Vogue* through artistic photography, Anna Wintour decides what kind of clothes and models to include in the magazine. In multiple scenes, Wintour's decisions reinforce the post-feminist beauty ideals and new femininities; meanwhile, Coddington contradicts the constructed femininities and even rebels against the rules set by Wintour and the fashion industry.

Coddington has limited control and sometimes her ideas and projects are shut down and ridiculed by Anna Wintour. The documentary emphasizes their competition and power dynamics in a plethora of events and conflicts. Nonetheless, as the film shows, Anna Wintour has the ultimate power and receives the accolades. The documentary depicts how two professional women depend on each other while maintaining their job security and positive reputation.

The importance of *Vogue* in the fashion industry cannot be understated. As Howell explains, “When a woman buys a copy of *Vogue*, she hopes to find the magic ingredients that will enable her to become, in some undefined way, more than she was yesterday. *Vogue*’s inspirational early publisher, Conde Nast, turned the magazine into a machine for supplying this ingredient” (27). In the documentary, Anna Wintour and her team extend the power, influence and reputation of *Vogue* well beyond its earliest versions. “The transformation of self with the help of experts, in the hope, or expectation of improvement of status and life changes through the acquisition of forms of cultural and social capital” (McRobbie 128). *Vogue* and its editorial staff play a significant role in creating and reinforcing post-feminist characters and post-feminist sensibilities. As the documentary illustrates, millions of women in the United States read *Vogue* and consume fashion and beauty products in order to fit societal expectations. As Bae explains, beautifying oneself has been predominantly based on patriarchal standards, and demands have been made that the female body be decorated for the pleasure of the male gaze. This description positions the female body as an object of the male gaze. The objectifying gaze thus disempowers the female in a binary relationship in which the female is a powerless, passive object and the male, and empowering subject. (30)

Nevertheless, the documentary chants the mantra over and over again that Wintour holds the highest power in the fashion industry, thereby shifting the power from male gaze to female gaze.

Considered to be the Pope of the fashion world, Wintour's gaze is deemed the most important in the industry: her decisions hold weight for *Vogue* and designers' collections alike. However, the images and ideologies she emphasizes are still reinforcing patriarchal norms, objectifying and victimizing women even though they appear to be empowered and free from the limitations of traditional gender roles. Drawing from McRobbie and Taft, Bae criticizes the postfeminist investment of female power as a "sexualized, individualistic, external beauty-oriented consumerist attitude [that] has provoked an outcry from earlier feminists for having an uncritical stance that seemingly celebrates patriarchal norms" (28). Wintour is criticized by contemporary feminist scholars Jean Killbourne and Sut Jhally for collaborating with the advertising industry in order to perpetuate negative ideologies among women. Bae posits the idea of the post-feminist contradiction, which "inherently involve[s] an ideological contradiction: Women use autonomous control over their bodies and appearance to build a construct that will eventually be objectified by the male gaze" (29). Consequently, *Vogue* and its staff work to reinforce these contradictory messages for male pleasure. To further complicate this predicament, Stern adds, "Women are achieving power through their appearance and sexuality. This sexual power is often identified with capturing male affection. Further, this normalized heterosexual desire has been closely linked to consumption practices" (168). Thus, women's empowerment is an illusion. *The September Issue* presents real examples of the ways in which the fashion world continuously encourages women to consume more in order to fit the modern world – a world driven by a post-feminist culture.

It is as if *Vogue* is the bible of fashion industry, and Anna Wintour is portrayed as the Pope of fashion journalism and the fashion industry in *The September Issue*. For example, early in the film, Candy Pratts Price claims that working for *Vogue* is like "belonging to a church."

When the director asks if Anna Wintour is the high priest of this foundation, Price responds by calling Anna Wintour the Pope of fashion industry because she is considered the most powerful authority. The documentary characterizes each female character in different ways. For instance, Candy Pratts Price is represented as a fashion figure who has a positive reputation, but inferior to that of Anna Wintour. The filmmaker does not even let Price talk about her own achievements; he simply uses her interviews to elevate Wintour's reputation and persona. Thus, Candy Pratts Price is seen as a secondary figure that holds a background role in the film. The filmmaker does not emphasize Price's important contributions to *Vogue* and the fashion industry – she is merely a less powerful follower of Wintour.

The September Issue portrays Grace Coddington as a positive leader in the fashion magazine industry through her involvement with *Vogue*. As the creative director of the magazine, she is a powerful post-feminist heroine in her own right. Nevertheless, the film also depicts the competitive friendship and power dynamics between Wintour and Coddington, and their professional and social interactions. Even though Coddington creates vivid and philosophical fashion stories through clothing, make-up and photography settings, the documentary asserts that acceptance of the work she produces (and therefore her power) depends on Wintour. As Borrelli explains, "Fashion itself is a glorious and protean fiction. The creation of a 'glossy' like *Vogue* is not unlike the creation of a work of literature. Both magazine editors and authors craft their own worlds. Fashion fictions in *Vogue* are communicated using images and words" (247-248). Grace Coddington's diligence and work is crucial to *Vogue* since the entire magazine depends on her creation of stories through colorful trendy clothes and accessories. She is depicted as the female professional who inspires and reinforces the values of the previous feminist movements. For example, the filmmaker asks her opinion about creating

powerful female stories by using 1920s and 1960s clothing styles. McDowell agrees with Coddington's photo creations, claiming "fashion travels in a continuous line and the present can only be fully illuminated by an understanding of the past. What happened in the Fifties and Sixties, or even earlier, links directly with the preoccupations and interests of fashion in the present" (7). Indeed, Coddington's photo series, inspired by the past, point out how contemporary women achieved their empowerment through first-wave and second-wave feminism. Thus, she celebrates femininity and girl power instead of creating post-feminist victim images.

The friendship between Wintour and Coddington is depicted as difficult at times due to Wintour's high demanding, decisive and even stubborn personality. Anna Wintour is a difficult boss who treats her colleagues harshly without needing to give a reason, constructive feedback or explanation for doing so. However, both of them have an enormous impact on post-feminism, shaping and improving post-feminist characters and consumer culture through the magazines they help create. Wintour's professional and social relationships transform everyone around her – she promotes an environment filled with anxiety to do more, act more, and produce more for *Vogue*. As the BBC documentary *Boss Women: Anna Wintour* illustrates, Wintour's strict and demanding expectations are "done with the intention to pull the best out of her coworkers and employees" (BBC). For example, one of Wintour's former assistants, Isabella Blow, claimed that through "working with Anna, I learned so much. She taught me to be efficient and to have passion, to be responsible and reliable, and to have a great sense of humor. What people don't realize is that Anna has a cracking sense of humor" (Crowe 72-73). *The September Issue* shows Wintour's personality through various complex relationships she has in the fashion industry. Her work and social relationships are depicted as transformational, especially for her female

colleagues who gain power in the fashion and beauty industries through working and developing a professional relationship with a female boss.

Post-feminist ideology suggests that as contemporary women have gained power in the workforce and media, their appearances and representations have also changed. Therefore, as it has been stated throughout this thesis, women have gained equality and do not need to fight anymore, which is an illusion. Fashion magazines like *Vogue* reinforce post-feminist ideologies and complexities by encouraging contemporary women to embrace their femininity through a consumerist culture full of unattainable beauty standards and ideals. These magazines also reinforce the traditional gender roles in patriarchal society. As Sut Jhally states in the documentary *The Codes of Gender*,

The traditional code of submissiveness, powerlessness, and childishness, we have seen the rise of prominent representations of feminine power, captured in the emergence of the female action hero – a seemingly new ideal of women as active, aggressive, and in control. Far from being flailing off-balance airheads and victims, these are tough girls who kick butt (*The Codes of Gender*).

Regardless of the media's effort to produce examples and images of empowered women, fashion magazines and advertising reinforce unrealistic body standards, making it difficult to completely break stereotypes and traditional feminine gender codes. "Stereotypes of femininity are constructed through appearance – 'the visual image'" (Coppock et al. 110). For instance, *The September Issue* represents the female models as fashion objects similar to store displays or dress hangers. In the scene when the *Vogue* team visits the fashion designer Stephano Pilati, they see his new collection through female fashion models. Nobody greets or talks to them. It is as if they are invisible or treated as dress hangers that are taken off of the rack when requested. They do

not speak or respond – all they do is model for Pilati and Wintour. This provides a significant example of the many ways in which Wintour promotes the objectification of women in post-feminist culture.

Gill and Elias claim that post-feminist culture indirectly “tells women to hate their bodies, and subjects female celebrities and women in the public eye to ‘nano-surveillance’” (182). For instance, the film emphasizes this theory during the magazine’s cover page preparation. Wintour is cordial to Sienna Miller, who will appear on the cover, complimenting her beauty in the dress she tried on for the photo shoot. The filmmaker captures Wintour’s demeanor through close-up camera angles, allowing the audience to decide if she is being sincere or manipulative toward Miller. Additionally, the filmmaker’s edits emphasize how Wintour is kinder and more affectionate to Miller than she is to her female teammates. Anna Wintour’s actions in this scene provide a significant example of how post-feminist culture portrays celebrities and praises celebrity culture (wealth, fame, the obsession with beauty, youthfulness, and body image, etc.) itself. Hollinger refers to these types of female friendship as “manipulative friendships” in the post-feminist narrative (208). All of the *Vogue* team members note that Sienna Miller has great feminine curves for such a skinny woman, reinforcing the post-feminist expectation about women’s body image. Nevertheless, as the scene continues and the cover page is prepared, Sienna Miller’s photo is airbrushed to make her look skinnier with a longer neck, and have porcelain-like skin. Thus, the film points out the hypocritical behaviors of Wintour and her team. According to Gill and Elias, “Women’s magazines’ attempt to distance themselves from widespread accusations of ‘promoting’ eating disorders,” and the film captures this pressure through the scene with Miller and the other fashion models (182). Nevertheless, by discussing Sienna Miller’s body type and acknowledging her skinniness as an ideal beauty

standard for women, the documentary shows that post-feminist culture is equally damaging to celebrities. Fashion magazines “perpetuate patriarchal relations through the promotion of a restrictive beauty standard,” which continuously reinforce the illusions of post-feminism driven by consumer culture (Budgeon and Currie 173).

Whenever Wintour smiles and compliments Miller for her beauty and fit body, the filmmaker also captures other female co-workers’ facial expressions. They remain silent and obedient, but appear to be aware of Wintour’s typical diplomacy and protocol for welcoming the celebrity cover girl. This scene represents ambiguity in sincerity, power roles and interaction between professional women in the female friendship film. During the photo shoot, the *Vogue* team members have difficulty with Sienna Miller’s hair – as Tonne Goodman declares, “it does not look its best” and rolls her eyes in frustration. The filmmaker emphasizes Goodman’s insolent and belittling facial expressions through close shots. Her attitude towards Miller is shown as more unfriendly and distanced than Wintour’s attitude. Rosalind Gill states that “young women are presented as active, desiring social subjects, yet on the other hand they are subject to a level of scrutiny and hostile surveillance” in the fashion industry (442). Miller’s short hair does not fit with the ideal hair standards for *Vogue*, and the team diligently tries to find the best solution. They suggest using a very blonde wig even though Miller’s hair has darker shades. By doing so, the editors are reinforcing white dominance and privilege as the fashion and beauty industry is dominated by images of white women and idealized beauty politics. However, their wig solution does not look fashionable enough for the cover and the team including Wintour decides to go with Miller’s original hair without any aesthetic manipulation. This scene is significant since it points out the victimization of celebrities in the fashion world.

When Grace Coddington requests or suggests doing something for photo projects, nearly everyone around her agrees and follows her direction without resistance. Her communication style and tone is represented as soothing – friendly yet firm. She does not need to be passive aggressive in order to accomplish her vision because her vivid creativity, excitement and passion are contagious. For instance, during an interview, Sally Singer proclaims, “Grace is without question, the greatest living stylist. There’s no one better than Grace. There’s no one who can make any photographer take more beautiful, more interesting, more romantic, more just stunningly realized pictures than Grace.” Coddington portrays the characteristics of a positive and constructive female leader and post-feminist heroine who makes her colleagues comfortable around her. Even though Coddington also reinforces constructed femininity through the visual stories she creates for *Vogue*, her work philosophy is different than Anna Wintour because she considers *Vogue* and its content to be a part of the celebration of womanhood and freedom. Therefore, even though she is part of the fashion world, Coddington challenges and contradicts the capitalistic and post-feminist body image rules governed by *Vogue*. Wintour and Coddington do not only operate within the fashion and beauty industries. Many of their projects for *Vogue* are also humanitarian, which illustrates their goodwill and attitudes about giving back to society. For example, they support young and unrecognized designers through *Vogue* competitions. Both of them are stubborn and persistent and, as the film portrays, they are two women who depend on one another in a respectful manner. At the end of the documentary, Anna Wintour is asked what she thinks about Grace Coddington’s professional performance and contribution to *Vogue*. Wintour genuinely smiles while talking about Coddington and obviously respects, admires and feels a loyalty towards her colleague:

“I don’t believe for one minute that I have a sense of what is going to happen or a sense of real change the way Grace does. I mean, Grace is a genius and there is no one that can visualize a picture or understand the direction of fashion or produce a great shoot. I mean, she’s just remarkable. She and I don’t always agree, but I think that over the years we have learned how to deal with each other’s different points of view.”

This scene is significant since it represents the positive and transformational example of female professional and social relationship in post-feminist world. Both women are in competition with each other, but they are also aware of their interdependence since their positive reputation relies on their collaborative relationship. Their competitiveness also transforms both of their professional successes. Even though Wintour is in charge of the magazine, the film also points out that she acknowledges the importance of Coddington’s leadership and indirectly admits that her personal success is dependent upon her colleague’s performance. Nevertheless, the film’s “highly idealized presentation of women’s friendship is involving perfect trust, acceptance, and understanding. While this type of relationship offers the female spectator an affirmation of female solidarity, it also supports an unrealistic conception of women’s relationships that cannot serve as a practical model for real-life friendships” (Hollinger 49).

Beyond Wintour and Coddington, the documentary also represents friendships between female fashion models who are involved with *Vogue*. For example, in the photo shoot scene in Italy, Coddington motivates the team by providing positive and constructive feedback. The fashion model Raquel Zimmermann speaks highly of Coddington, thanking her for allowing her to eat multiple fruit tarts without judgment or criticism about maintaining an ideal weight. The scene depicts the model as a post-feminist character who is victimized but also empowered by the fashion industry – a character who tries to maintain harsh body standards and expectations

while experiencing confusion and complex emotions. Thus, drawing from Molly Haskell, Hollinger explains post-feminism as “a mixture of both progressive and regressive representatives” (41). The model is portrayed as an insecure woman who needs both the approval of and unconditional acceptance from authority figures in the fashion world. Bae explains her predicament as “an embodiment of the imagined self that provides a sense of empowerment” (30). The film portrays the model as a post-feminist victim who is looking for a short-term escape by indulging in sugary food. This scene reinforces the victimization and contradiction of post-feminism through the depiction of interactions between the model and Coddington.

In another scene, Coddington dresses the fashion model, and even kneels down to tie her shoes. These details are significant examples of Coddington’s leadership style and humility. Her colleagues can reach her since she is friendly and welcoming. Thus, her professional and social relationships with her colleagues are positive and unthreatening, yet still transformational. As Sally Singer reiterates, “Grace is without question, the greatest living stylist. There’s no one better than Grace. There’s no one who can make any photographer take more beautiful, more interesting, more romantic, more just stunningly realized pictures than Grace.” Although Grace Coddington is a more approachable and friendly leader, she comes across as less powerful than Wintour, mainly because it is reinforced that bossy and bitter women win in the workplace. The documentary shows Anna Wintour running the business using bold, audacious, superior and intimidating means; in contrast, Grace Coddington creates all of the vivid and dream-like images of the magazine through passionate, loving, caring, kind interactions with everyone. When a journalist tells Anna Wintour that she is known as the “Ice Woman,” Wintour responds, “Well, this week has been very cold. That’s all I can say.” This scene depicts how Anna Wintour communicates in a diplomatic and emotionally distant way with everyone, especially with the

people who work for the news media. Nevertheless, her attitudes and behaviors seem more cautious towards women around her. Her ambiguous response confuses the journalist – is Wintour irritated by the question or is she being sarcastic?

The September Issue depicts women's professional and social relationships also as destructive, tyrannical and parasitic. For example, Anna Wintour is highly demanding, bossy and unapproachable while Grace Coddington is more welcoming, easy to communicate with and allows everyone to express their ideas in order to create the best images. Each one has strong leadership roles; however, the way they communicate with people is different. Anna Wintour is very decisive and difficult to work with. As Paul Poiret states, "Fashion needs a tyrant with clear insight into what was lacking in fashion at the turn of the century... So much indecisiveness and frippery cried out for someone with an eye for the bigger picture" (Seeling 25). Thus, even though her tyrannical behavior emotionally drains her colleagues, Anna Wintour's strict leadership and decisiveness is accepted by the fashion industry, seen as necessary for the continuity of *Vogue* magazine. In the documentary, Grace Coddington also appreciates how Anna Wintour's vision saved both *Vogue* magazine and their reputations: "Youth and trendiness are featured in Wintour's *Vogue*...She states that her approach is 'to have enough reality in the magazine not to lose a lot of readers, or a lot of people who aren't as hip as everybody else or willing to accept change'" (Borrelli 253). For this reason, she and Grace Coddington are often in disagreement about clothing choices for the September issue – they must please both the consumers and the *Vogue* followers.

Furthermore, the documentary repeatedly shows that everyone, including Coddington, becomes stressed out in order to please Wintour. For example, one of the recurring issues is color choices for the issue. Wintour does not like black and prefers to strictly avoid it in *Vogue*. In

contrast, Coddington embraces black and she tries to include into the color-blocking pages of the magazine. Wintour is very adamant and sure to voice her opinion about choosing colors and themes. She insists on colorful clothes, objects and overall photo-story themes since they look more appealing and attractive on the pages. If she feels as though her employees will contradict her, she intimidates them, communicating thorough body language and facial expressions that she is not open to other opinions. Thus, Wintour's professional and social relationships with her female colleagues are rocky, and she doesn't hesitate to create conflicts in order to get what she wants. These depictions are similar to the challenging relationships between the fashion magazine editors and their colleagues in *The Devil Wears Prada*, especially the intimidating and humiliating attitudes of Miranda Priestly and Anna Wintour are very similar.

For example, in the documentary *Elissa Santisi*, the style director of *Vogue*, is represented as a supportive female co-worker to Wintour. A significant example of a post-feminist character, the film emphasizes her involvement in creating the bionic women look on models. Drawing from McRobbie's post-feminist theory, Santisi applies feminist ideals into her fashion styles by creating so-called empowered bionic women in *Vogue*. When she and Wintour argue about creating the appropriate style for the magazine, the filmmaker captures the juxtaposition of Santisi's facial expressions and hands to Wintour's unfriendly looks. Their conversation conveys a sense of Wintour's attitude of superiority as she belittles Santisi for not creating better style and increasing her performance. Santisi is seen as a female character who shuts off quickly when her boss confronts and criticizes her ideas. She is represented as a relatively insecure, submissive and obedient professional woman; however, in one-on-one interviews, she is confident and easily expresses her ideas to the other female colleagues. Thus, *The September Issue* depicts the professional relationship between Santisi and Wintour as

intimidating, emotionally draining, yet transformative in order to create better fashion styles for *Vogue*.

While choosing the best colors and materials, Virginia Smith and Wintour have a bitter conversation. The filmmaker captures the dialogue through a close-shot between the two women to emphasize the competition and power dynamics. Wintour condemns and passive aggressively mocks Smith about choosing the color pink for the September issue. Cutler captures Smith's facial expressions and hand gestures to emphasize the ways in which she feels inferior, intimidated and humiliated in front of Wintour. Smith tries to confront her by claiming that she likes pink, but gives up quickly and yields to Wintour's suggestion. Nearly all of the female professionals in the film are characterized as lesser than Wintour, required to follow and accept her demands in order to survive and succeed in the fashion industry. Nonetheless, the film also depicts the harmonic collaboration amongst these female fashion magazine employees that extends beyond their interaction with Wintour.

Tonne Goodman, the fashion director of *Vogue*, is represented as an introverted, distant, and unsmiling female professional when she is around Wintour. For example, in the breakfast and business meeting scene with the CEO of Neiman Marcus and the *Vogue* team, Goodman sits quietly and only responds to questions when Wintour asks her to contribute. In this scene, Wintour is represented as the superior; meanwhile, Goodman and the other female colleagues are portrayed as inferior. When Coddington, Smith and Santisi try to choose the best clothes for the photo shoot, Goodman fades into the background; however, during interviews and in interactions with her female colleagues when Wintour is not present, Goodman is more outgoing, confident and a firm professional woman. Wintour is a manipulative boss who does not hesitate to discard Coddington and other colleagues' creative projects if she thinks they are unappealing for the

pages of *Vogue*. In the documentary, she is depicted as a ridiculously stubborn editor who even scraps \$50,000 photo shoots without considering budget problems or her colleagues' hard work, which upsets many people around her. Wintour's abusive attitudes are well-known in the fashion industry. In *The September Issue*, her female co-workers appear as though they are abused and overwhelmed by their boss due to her difficult personality.

Drawing from Baudrillard, Toffoletti claims that the fashion world "inhabit[s] a trans-aesthetic, hyperreal, and integral reality [that] raises significant questions for feminists seeking to analyze how women are commonly represented in Western media through the neoliberal guises of empowerment and choice" (106). Because Wintour encourages her assistants to modify images through airbrushing and Photoshop, her choice in images and the ways in which women are represented in *Vogue* feed post-feminist ideologies and characters. For example, female fashion models' photos are modified so that they appear to be skinnier and taller than they actually are in person. Although Wintour holds the power to create a modern and empowered female identity, she prefers to perpetuate unrealistic body and beauty standards that most women can neither achieve nor sustain. Her points of view reflect post-feminist ideology since she portrays contemporary femininity as extreme skinny, hyper-feminine, and hyper-sexualized. Furthermore, the effects of these images are a harsh reality for women beyond the fashion industry. For example, in one scene she rejects a photo of Jennifer Garner by saying, "She looks pregnant. We need to fix her." This is another significant example of the female gaze, and how she follows strict beauty ideals and reinforces post-feminist values. Garner is not skinny enough ("looks pregnant"), and Wintour rejects the image – yet another stereotypical example for post-feminism. Moreover, nobody contradicts her because they all feel threatened by her authority and are frightened by the possibility of losing their jobs. Therefore, Anna Wintour has a big

impact on contemporary society since she holds the power to reinforce post-feminist ideologies. Even though post-feminism posits that women are liberated in contemporary society, it is still obvious that women are trapped by fashion and beauty ideals controlled by consumer culture. Wintour, by virtue of her position with *Vogue*, controls the consumer culture and post-feminist ideologies, and this shows how post-feminism is fed by female authorities who foster traditional gender roles driven by patriarchy and capitalism. As Martin Roberts explains,

Commodification of women themselves and of models of femininity inseparable from mass consumption (fashion, cosmetics, etc.), the discourse of postfeminism has proceeded to stand this critique on its head, articulating a model of feminine identity unthinkable outside consumption and constructing a logic in which ‘empowerment’ –perhaps the central tenet of postfeminist ideology—is shown as dependent on self-confidence and sexual attractiveness, which in turn depend on the services of the fashion and beauty industries—all of which, needless to say, must be purchased (Tasker and Negra 229).

The September Issue is an example of how contemporary body and beauty images are often controlled by women fashion authorities who serve to create a harsher world for each other. Although the fashion magazines market contemporary women as empowered and have-it-all through their images, they follow the constructed femininity which is fostered by post-feminism. According to Riordan, “One specific concern is that women may feel empowered at the individual level, without any compulsion to act as a collective body...the rhetoric of empowerment contributes to rearticulating dominant patriarchal and capitalist values, while not substantially disrupting power relations” (282). Thus, women are not truly empowered, physically and emotionally freed from constructed gender roles which make post-feminist ideology as imaginary and fake.

In another significant scene in the film, Wintour and Coddington argue about money in the business meeting right before they leave for Europe to do the photo shoot. The scene shows how Wintour gets annoyed by Coddington's directness in talking about a budget; nevertheless, the scene itself carries ambiguous elements. For instance, even though Wintour doesn't like publicly talking about the financial issues of *Vogue* in front of the camera, she doesn't say much. Then, Coddington says to the camera that she insisted on that conversation on purpose to convince Wintour and prevent her from throwing away thousands of dollars for the photo projects. The documentary illustrates that Coddington, like Wintour, makes herself heard and respected through her decisiveness; however, she does this through more constructive communication methods. She is not manipulative or bossy, but she knows when to stand up for herself and the other colleagues' professional efforts. Even though Wintour seems to ignore their points of view and needs, she actually lets them decide how to manage the budget and bring in the best visuals for the magazine.

Conclusion

The September Issue takes the audience into *Vogue* magazine's office and follows Anna Wintour, Grace Coddington, Tonne Goodman, Virginia Smith, and Elissa Santisi as well their female colleagues and models during the preparations for the September 2007 issue. The film represents how assumptions about empowered modern women are perpetuated through fashion magazines prepared by predominantly female staffs. The film also shows that female professional and social relationships between Anna Wintour, Grace Coddington and their female colleagues in the fashion magazine industry are driven by consumption. It is a significant example of post-feminist ideology due to its complexity and contradictory representations of women's lives through a fashion magazine. Wintour and Coddington possess a powerful

authority in the fashion industry and contemporary patriarchal society, creating standards of ideal femininity and representing women in the pages of *Vogue* magazine. Wintour follows a more traditional path, utilizing specific business, marketing and consumption strategies, while Coddington chooses to prepare each visual through arts, aesthetics and fashion photography. Both women have positive and negative sides of their professional and social relationships, but no matter what, they keep their team strong since they and the fashion industry both benefit. *Vogue* contributes to constructed feminine identities, contemporary fashion styles, and the female images that reinforce post-feminist ideology. Martin Roberts notes that fashion magazines complicate “a recognizably postfeminist ideology of female emancipation through embracing bourgeois gender identities and the consumer culture that goes with them in contrast to be feminist rejection ” (Tasker and Negra 244). Thus, *The September Issue* is a significant contemporary documentary that raises contradictory questions about post-feminism and consumer culture in a fashion industry that is shaped by female authorities.

CONCLUSION

This thesis focused on the three contemporary female friendship films: the mockumentary *Prêt-à-Porter/Ready to Wear* (1994) by Robert Altman, the fiction film *The Devil Wears Prada* (2006) by David Frankel, and the documentary *The September Issue* (2009) by R.J. Cutler. Each case study examined the representations of professional and social relationships among female fashion magazine editors, reporters, their assistants as well as with their female colleagues in a male dominated fashion industry driven by consumer culture. Post-feminist theory, with all of its complexities and contradictions, was used as the theoretical framework to justify the dynamics between socially constructed femininities and the fashion industry in the female friendship films analyzed.

The introduction and literature review identified the film types as contemporary female friendship films. Due to the complex and contradictory structure of the three films' narratives, the female character development, the conflicting and multiple representations of each female character, it was deemed fitting to use a post-feminist theoretical lens. For example, female characters were depicted as liberated and empowered career woman in the fashion industry; however, the storylines continuously pointed out the various ways in which they faced gendered inequalities and were objectified, hyper-sexualized, insulted, and victimized by men and other women. To justify the argument, this thesis used the academic work of contemporary scholars such as Karen Hollinger, Yvonne Tasker, Diane Negra, Rosalind Gill, Stephanie Genz, Michele M. Lazar, Michelle S. Bae, and Angela McRobbie whose area of study focus on gender, society, consumer culture, film and media representations of women, and feminist movements.

Each film's narrative served as a significant example of post-feminist texts that include and reinforce the stereotypes of post-feminist characters and post-feminist heroines. Even though

the films were released during the era of third wave feminism, due to their portrayals of female professionals, the thesis revealed that women's empowerment and absolute freedom is illusory. Moreover, the films' narratives worked to reinforce the elements of post-feminist contradictions. Thus, the representations of contemporary women in these three films emphasized the absence of second-wave feminism sentiment and successes while illustrating how traditional patriarchal values in the fashion industry continue to objectify and victimize women.

The case studies analyzed the three films and found that female friendships in the fashion industry are comprised of complex dynamics and agendas that play out in positive and negative ways. Powerful female leaders can motivate and inspire their assistants and colleagues to transform, but they can also manipulate, intimidate and exploit other women for their own personal and/or professional gain. The films showed that interpersonal relationships between women are not always destructive and abusive, but can also have transformational and empowering impacts on women's lives. Even though the female characters were objectified, ridiculed or victimized (by either male or female colleagues), each film had positive portrayals of post-feminist heroines who stood up for themselves and their female peers. This representation of so-called empowered individuals in the fashion industry worked to uphold the complex post-feminist narrative.

Robert Altman's mockumentary film *Pret-a-Porter/Ready to Wear* suggested celebrating female victory through ethical and meaningful fashion, female friendship, and feminist values. Even though women are often cruelly depicted in the film, it still ended with the positive message about women unifying and collaborating in order to gain self-respect and deserved rights in the patriarchal fashion industry. David Frankel's fiction film *The Devil Wears Prada* presented each woman as empowered and successful in the fashion industry while portraying

them as miserable and conflicted in their personal relationships. Also, the film drew attention to the issues women face regarding body image. For example, the main character was bullied by her female colleagues because of her outdated clothes and weight, which lead to her desire to physical transform her image and style. The film demonstrated how women face criticism and professional obstacles if they do not abide by beauty ideals – if they want to be successful, they must be willing to be objectified and even victimized in the name fashion. The film’s main character is liberated, but the audience is left questioning her decision to choose a successful career over a traditional life with her boyfriend. Good women like Andy win if they work hard, but they should know that they might have to sacrifice their romantic relationships in order to succeed. Meanwhile, bitter characters are punished with with miserable emotional burdens and destroyed relationships. Thus, the film still sends mixed messages to contemporary female audiences, leaving them confused and reinforcing the illusory structure of post-feminist ideology. R.J. Cutler’s documentary *The September Issue* took the audience into the American offices of Vogue to witness the months of preparations for the issue. It explored how the female gaze of Anna Wintour and her team has a deep impact on the construction of femininity and feminist movements by re-creating patriarchal attitudes in the fashion industry.

Because contemporary feminist film studies and women’s and gender studies are still growing academic fields, the limitations of this thesis were choosing and applying discipline-specific theories. For instance, the three films were identified as female friendship films even though the female characters did not appear to be close friends; instead, they were professional colleagues who had limited and minimal interactions outside of their work environment. Due to the lack of scholarly literature on professional female interactions, the thesis utilized the theories of Karen Hollinge, Yvonne Taskerand Michelle S. Bae, which are based on female friendship

films. Feminist film scholarship needs academic work on women in the workforce, specifically looking at female relationship films that focus on stories about generational struggles, women's human rights issues, and other workplace challenges women face.

For further academic work, this thesis would suggest that academic scholars interested in feminist film studies and gender studies create new film theories and areas of study that interrogate female leadership films, female business and corporate films, and/or female success and career films. Opening the field of study to different categories would encourage more academic research and promote collaboration among other disciplines such as women's and gender studies, psychology, sociology, and business. Additionally, there is a correlation between feminist film studies, feminist movements, and feminine identity, women still need to fight for true gender equality. Otherwise, society and the filmic representation of society will be stuck in the illusionary cycle of post-feminism.

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