

**TRACING FEMALE SEXUALISATION AND
SUBJECTIFICATION IN GILBERT'S *CITY OF
GIRLS* AND WEISBERGER'S *CHASING
HARRY WINSTON*: A POST-FEMINIST
ANALYSIS**

BY

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**Tracing Female Sexualisation and Subjectification in Gilbert's
City of Girls and Weisberger's *Chasing Harry Winston*: A Post-
Feminist Analysis**

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THESIS AND DEFENSE APPROVAL FORM

The undersigned certify that they have read the following thesis, examined the defense, are satisfied with the overall exam performance, and recommend the thesis to the Faculty of English Studies for acceptance.

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I also understand that if evidence of plagiarism is found in my thesis/dissertation at any stage, even after the award of a degree, the work may be cancelled, and the degree revoked.

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ABSTRACT

Title: Tracing Female Sexualisation and Subjectification in Gilbert's *City of Girls* and Weisberger's *Chasing Harry Winston*: A Post-Feminist Analysis

The role of postfeminism in creating empowered female subjecthood has been assessed in this research, by analyzing two chick lit novels: Elizabeth Gilbert's *City of Girls*, 2019 and Lauren Weisberger's *Chasing Harry Winston*, 2008. In this context, postfeminism is defined through Rosalind Gill's concept presented in *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 2007, termed as Postfeminist Sensibility, which is a "distinct" sensibility, neither feminist nor anti-feminist, and posits several intersecting themes: subjectification (eroticization of female lifestyle and representation of women as dominant subjects), individualism (choice and empowerment), sexualisation of culture (increase in discourses about sex and sexuality, erotic presentation of girls), and femininity as a bodily property (female body as the source of identity, power and worth) (Gill, "Postfeminist Media Culture" 147). The Textual Analysis method by Alan McKee has been used to analyze the data while carrying out a qualitative research paradigm. Through the lens of these themes, the research has found that *City of Girls* and *Chasing Harry Winston* attempt to portray women as entirely free agents who choose to please themselves and acquire a unique identity that measures their worth and grants them autonomy over their lives. Yet, this agency and unique feminine identity are sourced solely in the female body, conditioned on the women producing themselves as sexually alluring subjects. Therefore, these postfeminist characters, under the guise of autonomy, have been found to be subservient to societal norms of sexuality, beauty, and consumer spending in order to conform to an attractive, sensual, and feminine model of a woman. Therefore, the agent of power and the assertive postfeminist subject is not entirely free in her choices, after all. The notion of femininity, with its relation to subjectivity and individualism, shows us the internalization of patriarchal and neoliberal standards under the guise of subjectified, postfeminist depiction of women in chick lit.

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DEDICATION

*I dedicate this thesis to my late Mother,
who helped me perceive the infinitude of Light.*

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“Feminism”, in popular culture and public discourse, is an umbrella term used for a wide variety of ideas and sensibilities, some of which are distinctly different from (and even contrary to) the core notions existing in the feminist movement. In academic discourse during the 1990s (Banet-Weiser), a few distinct offshoots of feminism started being labeled as “postfeminism”. The term was first mentioned in the book *Sexual/Textual Politics*, 1985, with the aim of bringing together different feminist movements. Over the years, “postfeminism” came to be used as a label for neoliberal varieties of feminism as well as antifeminist backlash. In 2007, Rosalind Gill, a British theorist, criticized these various notions of postfeminism as incomplete and nonspecific, and presented a comprehensive analytical perspective on postfeminism. She defined postfeminism a “distinctive sensibility, with a number of interrelated themes” reflected in contemporary Anglo-American media and literature (Gill, “Postfeminist Media Culture” 147). Chick lit, in particular, contains female characters whose experiences reflect postfeminist themes invoked by Gill. Given the popularity of this literary genre, it is imperative that famed contemporary works centered on postfeminist characters be analyzed, to understand the role of chick lit in shaping the modern Western culture which dominates the global cultural narrative. In this study, the author makes an attempt at that very task, by presenting an analysis, through a postfeminist lens, of two contemporary chick lit novels written by bestselling authors.

1.1. Background of Study

The agenda or concept of feminism talks of equal rights for women on the basis of gender. The notion of feminism itself is contested and has been defined by different feminists undertaking diverse movements and ideologies based on equal rights for women. Postfeminism is defined by some critics as a movement against feminism, specifically second wave of feminism that is deemed racist and homophobic; while others define it as a modification and a step forward in feminism.

Under this historical context, it is important to briefly talk about the feminist movements. The first wave of feminism started in the 19th and early 20th Century (Mambrol). This wave talks about women's rights of suffrage and all the legal issues that women face while living in a male dominated society; especially the right for education and workplace rights, which include equal wages for both genders. It ends with white women winning their right to vote. The granting of legal rights put women out from a subservient position (Mambrol).

The second wave of feminism starts from early 1960s and lasts till late 1980s. This wave is marked by protests against woman subjugation and the ways in which women get deprived of their cultural rights and personal rights, which feminists of the second wave highlight as a political and legal issue than a personal or cultural one. The second wave talks not only about the legal rights of women, but goes deeper into more private issues that women face in a society and at their homes. e.g., reproductive rights, domestic violence, sexual harassment, etc. (Anand). The famous American writer and activist, Betty Friedan, has played a significant role in the second wave of feminism and marked it as her own. Her book *The Feminine Mystique, 1963*, is considered a breakthrough in raising voice for the American women and breaking conventional norms and stereotypes that existed on a large scale in the 20th Century. The basic idea that Friedan has brought forward is of women's individuality and their identity loss that happens due to them being mere child bearers and housewives. She writes in her book *The Feminine Mystique, 1963*, "Over and over women heard in voices of tradition and of Freudian sophistication that they could desire no greater destiny than to glory in their own femininity. Experts told them how to catch a man and keep him..., how to dress, look, and act more feminine and make marriage more exciting" (Friedan 15). Friedan analyzes how femininity is defined, in which women find fulfillment for themselves and lose the part of themselves that could be more than just of a mother or a wife.

The second wave paved way for the third wave of feminism which began in the early 1990s. This wave is a reaction to second wave feminism in which the main focus is on elite and middle-class white woman, with neglect to women of colour. Feminism of third wave questioned the meaning of femininity that only included the white woman and discarded the existence of feminine gender as a whole (Drucker). These prejudiced distinctions are being made which create a divide between women

and hence the actual purpose of the movement gets lost. The waves of feminism have been criticized over time for encapsulating and confining the broader picture and not defining it in a more meaningful and complete manner. This criticism is done mainly by the Asian and non-Anglo-Saxon women, the women from the colonized parts of the world whose voices have not been heard and who are deprived of all kinds of rights, being doubly marginalized (Krolokke 1). The agenda that the fourth wave brings forth starting from the year 2012, is mainly with regards to struggle for women's rights on social media platforms in this era of digital media. Hashtag movements like #metoo have gained popularity in exposing the sexual harassment crimes committed by men (Cochrane).

Postfeminism is perceived and conceptualized in several contradictory forms by different researchers. According to some literary researchers, postfeminism refers to the anti-feminist idea that women have already achieved equality and freedom (Zimmerman) ("Postfeminism"). Many critics argue that postfeminism has diminished the struggle and work that had been undertaken through feminism, in effect giving further strength to the existing patriarchal nature of society (Litosseliti). While other researchers believe that postfeminism is a step forward in feminism, in the process of female emancipation and empowerment ("Postfeminism"), the feminist Susan Faludi calls postfeminism a backlash against feminism; however, she accuses feminism to be the cause of postfeminism (Faludi).

The notion of postfeminism is also linked with neoliberalism; in media and chick lit, postfeminist ideals of femininity and sexuality are highlighted alongside the neoliberal idea of consumer spending (Edua). The postfeminist theorist Angela McRobbie takes this definition forward to highlight the "entanglement" of postfeminist and neo-liberal ideas, which portray an individualistic female identity, independent of patriarchal dependencies (Wilkes) (McRobbie). Neoliberalism emphasizes on the individuality of every woman, on the development of these individual identities, and how these identities must be embraced (Wilkes). Feminists, on the other hand, argue for the existence of a universal identity, which challenges the postfeminist perspective.

Theorists like Rosalind Gill also address the notion of post-postfeminism and define through a broader perspective: underlining postfeminism after feminism in a straightforward and linear manner is erroneous, as within feminism, there is a lot that

is contradictory and researchable, however, a post-postfeminist phenomena needs to emphasize on the importance on the different forms of feminism and research further into postfeminism, as the notion has much to offer to feminist cultural studies and critics (Gill, *Post-postfeminism?* 610). The notions of feminism and post-postfeminism are not taken in this research in order to thoroughly analyze the gap created through Chick Lit in the form of postfeminism, and conduct further research that is required to understand this shift.

1.2. Chick Lit Genre

Chick lit is a genre of literature that consists of fictional narratives about women protagonists and targets female audience. The term was coined by novelists Chris Mazza and Jeffrey DeShell in an anthology of postfeminist fiction published in 1995 (Maddox). In Oxford English Dictionary, chick lit is defined as "literature by, for, or about women esp. a type of fiction, typically focusing on the social lives and relationships of young professional women, and often aimed at readers with similar experiences" (LU). Common themes of chick lit include sex, love, marriage, dating, along with issues of female identity and independence (LU). The genre highlights modern woman's struggles in defining her identity and finding the perfect partner for herself, all in a humorous setting and manner.

1.3. Postfeminism as a "Sensibility"

Postfeminist Sensibility defines postfeminism as a "distinct sensibility" (Gill, "Postfeminist Media Culture" 147); neither regarded as a feministic concept, speaking for woman emancipation; nor is it considered anti-feminist, criticizing feminism. Gill defines postfeminism as a response to feminism. It specifies several themes and analyzes their interrelatedness and their relation with neoliberalism. Through this theoretical framework, the phenomenon of postfeminism and its representation in media and chick lit discourse are explored. These themes include: subjectification, individualism (choice and empowerment), sexualisation of culture and femininity as a bodily property. With the analysis of these themes, Gill has explored postfeminist media culture, and touched upon its representation in chick lit. In the undertaken study, the researcher carries out a thorough analysis of the respective themes and their portrayal in chick lit. Through the analysis, this research holds careful responsibility to define the relationship between female identity, power and femininity, and

individualism and subjectification. It demystifies how power operates and how the notion of individualism and choice has been portrayed to create the sexualized female identity. Moreover, unlike Gill's exploration and analysis of postfeminist media culture, the thesis analyses chick lit and gives a different and deep insight of the postfeminist woman of chick lit.

According to Rosalind Gill, postfeminism draws a connection between female body and femininity and defines them to be the same. Gill argues about the orthodox ways in which femininity is represented, how high heels, lipstick, or glamour, and owning a "sexy body" are more in tune with the female strength now, (Gill, "Postfeminist Media Culture" 150). It can also be said that the most prominent features, as highlighted by Gill, are the ways in which chick lit portrays female subjects, concerning itself with the female body as a defining feature of women. Femininity seems to give the idea as if it is identified as a physical image or "a bodily property rather than a structural, psychological or social one. Defining oneself with how one looks or the 'sexy body' that one owns is embodied as a woman's main source of distinctiveness" (Gill, "Postfeminist Media Culture" 149).

1.4. Overview of Research

In this research, the conflicts and limitations of previously discussed definitions and viewpoints of postfeminism have been assessed through epistemological inquiry. The researcher narrows down the notion of postfeminism to Gill's concept of Postfeminist Sensibility. Therefore, the exploration of this concept is central to this research.

The research analyzes the portrayal of "postfeminist" women in two contemporary chick lit novels that narrativize the idea of women empowerment – Elizabeth Gilbert's *City of Girls, 2019* and Lauren Weisberger's *Chasing Harry Winston, 2008* – in the light of the postfeminist sensibility, and its specific themes, established by Gill. The researcher has attempted to analyze postfeminist characters in these novels under themes brought forth by Gill which establish the postfeminist sensibility. The research is an effort to develop a connection between these themes and analyze the female characters and their portrayal in the chick lit genre. The analysis explores how chick lit creates the identity of postfeminist female characters. As Gill highlights the vicious evaluation of female body that is being "readily

accessible to be coded sexually” (“Postfeminist Media Culture” 152), the research also analyzes the portrayal of the notion of authority and power of female characters over their body and, consequently, their identity. Moreover, it explores how sexualization and subjectification of women in the respective novels portray them as subservient to norms set by the society (which is similar to the male fantasy displayed in pornography) for a woman.

Elizabeth Gilbert, the writer of *City of Girls, 2019*, is an American author who writes both fiction and non-fiction works. She has won many awards for several books that she has written over the time. Some of her famous books involve: *Eat, Pray, Love, 2006*; *Stern Men, 2000*; *Pilgrims 1997*; and *The Signature of All Things, 2013*. Many of Gilbert’s works revolve around the themes of woman empowerment and feminism. *City of Girls, 2019* is a chick lit novel that highlights the themes of woman empowerment, individualism, subjectification, choice, and authority of main female characters over themselves, over men, and over other women. It follows the main protagonist, *Vivian*, as she goes through various phases of her life in order to find her true self and identity. The approach that Gilbert embeds in portraying woman empowerment is one that has gotten normalized in contemporary era chick lit and requires much in-depth analysis.

Lauren Weisberger is also a novelist from America. Her most notable work is the popular fiction *The Devil Wears Prada, 2003*. In the novel *Chasing Harry Winston, 2008*, the author has narrated a story of three beautiful women, *Adriana, Leigh, and Emmy*, who are best friends and vow to change their lives in the course of one year. The novel highlights the themes of subjectification, choice and individualism, femininity as a bodily property that is portrayed by the main female characters. Through detailed analysis of the novel, different life choices made by the main characters have been brought under analysis to show the sexualization of culture and subjectification of women in chick lit discourse.

Gilbert’s and Weisberger’s portrayal of women through their protagonists brings forth a detailed overview of how women in their novels are shown striving to create meaning for themselves in a society and how their journey unfolds in creating their identity. The narrative of postfeminism that is used in chick lit fiction shows women’s life struggles to solely be revolving around their appearance and sexuality, to the extent that these issues come to define female identity. This narrative is adopted

by the wide female target audience that chick lit literature has; the society, especially women, practice such narratives with passion (LU). In the present research, such narratives and the portrayal of freedom, choice and power have been analyzed.

Through the novels *City of Girls, 2019* and *Chasing Harry Winston, 2008*, this research analyzes the female characters by applying Rosalind Gill's concept of Postfeminist Sensibility. Moreover, the research also helps in understanding sexualization, subjectification, woman empowerment and individualism, femininity as bodily property and its relation with how power operates, through detailed analysis in the chick lit discourse.

1.5. Thesis Statement

City of Girls and *Chasing Harry Winston* seem to portray women as independent entities, having authority on their bodies as free agents, which they experience through sexualisation and subjectification.

1.6. Research Objectives

- To examine portrayal of individualism and authority of main female characters in terms of femininity as a bodily property
- To explore how sexualisation and subjectification of women in *City of Girls* and *Chasing Harry Winston* portray them as subservient to societal norms

1.7. Research Questions

- How do *City of Girls* and *Chasing Harry Winston* portray female characters' authority on their bodies?
- How do subjectification and sexualised female representation play out in Gilbert's *City of Girls* and Weisberger's *Chasing Harry Winston*?

1.8. Significance & Rationale of Study

In the current study, an analysis of postfeminism and of female characters in chick lit fiction through a postfeminist lens helps reveal the sexualisation and subjectification of women in this genre under the guise of freedom and empowerment. Through the concept of Postfeminist Sensibility, the research identifies and explores women's authority over their bodies and their individuality in Lauren Weisberger's *Chasing Harry Winston, 2008* and Elizabeth Gilbert's *City of Girls, 2019*. The current

study has chosen female authors' works as majority of chick lit involves the works of women authors through which the analysis of how women are represented by women is being observed.

The collection of research available in academic literature presents perspectives on postfeminism in fiction, which are incomplete views in one respect or another. While some include an analysis of postfeminism and consumerism, others have explored either solely the female identity or female independence, or its role in media advertisement. In contrast, the rationale of the study is that the in-depth research of the design of postfeminist female characters has been carried out to present a comprehensive view on postfeminism in chick lit fiction. It is relevant to study this due to the fact that given literature is a major contributor to culture. Therefore, exploring postfeminism becomes essential as it has been shaping the contemporary culture, yet most of the society is unaware of the term altogether. In addition to this, it is evident to explore this shift of postfeminism to not only distinguish the new femininities created under the hood of and within feminism, but also understand postfeminism that has been merged into feminism, before we jump onto post-postfeminism.

1.9. Delimitation

The research study is delimited to the analysis of selected female characters and the ways in which they are portrayed using Rosalind Gill's concept of Postfeminist Sensibility, 2007 and her themes of subjectification, femininity as a bodily property, empowerment, choice, and individualism, which establish a postfeminist sensibility. It highlights how women in Lauren Weisberger's novel *Chasing Harry Winston*, 2008 and Elizabeth Gilbert's novel *City of Girls*, 2019 are portrayed in a sexualised manner and their identity and femininity is defined through the sexualisation of their body. Through focus on women's bodies and their lifestyle, the thesis analyses empowered female subjects and their identity.

1.10. Chapter Breakdown

The thesis is broken down into multiple chapters, with the next chapter focused on exploring relevant literature to identify, evaluate, and compare previous works, to reveal gaps that the current research aims to address. Chapter 3 establishes the research methodology, including the research design and the theoretical

framework employed in the research. Chapter 4 is the meat of the study, providing an analysis of the selected literature as well as the broader chick lit domain to answer the research questions posed in the thesis. The whole discussion is concluded in the final chapter to provide a summary of the discoveries along with recommendations for future work.

1.11. Operational Definitions

- Individualism: choice and empowerment
- Subjectification: representation as assertive, sexual subjects (instead of silent, passive objects)
- Sexualisation: erotic presentation of girls

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Postfeminism is seen through various lenses, concocting different contextual meanings. In this chapter, I discuss how different authors and theorists view and analyze postfeminism as a concept, and as a part of the chick lit fiction. I have also cited chick lit novels and films that incorporate the postfeminist woman. The novels highlight a deeper understanding of the concept of postfeminism, along with its connection and contradictions with feminism. I also compare these researches with my work and specifically define how Rosalind Gill views postfeminism and how the themes in *Postfeminist Sensibility* are at work in the chick lit fiction.

2.1. Postfeminism as a Theory

In the paper *Postfeminism as a critical tool for gender and language, 2019*, Litosseliti, Gill and Favaro investigate and study postfeminism in several different contexts, along with the theoretical elements that constitute a postfeminist sensibility. Through this study, the relationship of postfeminism with neoliberal identities is also explored and the construction of gender is specifically researched upon. The concept of postfeminist sensibility highlights conflicting nature of postfeminism. The paper talks about objectification and brings forth how postfeminism has diminished the gender inequalities and the fight against such injustices. It also highlights that hard work on one's individual self is the solution for all women's subjugation and injustices. It analyzes how the individual-self is responsible for gender inequalities while the root causes embedded in the patriarchal system or practiced under neoliberal gender regimes are ignored. Problems such as dissatisfaction from married life, gender wage inequalities, or any inferiority complexes about physical appearance entirely require work on the individual self, along with practicing approaches in such regards are posited as solutions. While talking about workplace discriminations, the authors say, "juggling family and work responsibilities is framed as an individual/exclusively women's issue (rather than a social or institutional challenge), ... issues of under-representation and double standards are placed firmly outside the

organization and must be anticipated and managed by the female employees themselves” (Gill, Beddoes & Pawley). Identification of the abnormalities of misogynistic culture or the underlying structural injustices that have been playing their role for long are completely disregarded. The paper also highlights specific depictions of masculinity and femininity that are brought to light and those that are excluded, by choice, whilst constructing further inequalities and power dynamic within traditionally constructed gender roles.

The notions of individualism, choice and femininity are also analyzed in the research paper *Postfeminism, Gender and Organization, 2017*, where Lewis, Benschop and Simpson talk about the notions of choice and individualism in postfeminism and their role in the field of gender and organization studies. While exploring postfeminism, the researchers highlight the many versions of postfeminism, and state how “the many versions of postfeminism contribute to its pervasiveness, power and versatility and this malleability means that it can be drawn on in many contradictory ways” (Projansky, Negra). The researchers explore endorsement of choice and the modification of femininity at workplaces. They connect the postfeminist woman with the neoliberal woman and address workplace issues. They analyze the ways in which women have to tame their femininity and act in a measured custom at their workplace. Women’s specific issues are addressed as personal and individual than being part of a gender-based system and being under the influence of gender or class. Such practices have increased issues of gender inequality than resolving them, as is the apparent claim of postfeminism. The researchers highlight effects of postfeminism in a work environment in which misogyny has increased, accepted, and normalized. The individual struggle to mold oneself without fighting against gender inequalities has made the root causes and organizational hierarchical setup to remain than gain more legitimacy, along with unjust division among genders. In the current research, the notion of individualism and femininity along with their relation with subjectification are analyzed in detail, while highlighting the sexualized nature of female identity and its role in creating this identity. Furthermore, these new individualities of women and their relation with neoliberalism are also discussed.

While highlighting the role of individualism, and placing the responsibility being solely on women’s individual-self in creating their individualities, postfeminism is defined as anti-feminist, and its connection comes to be made with neoliberalism.

Underlining this idea in the thesis *Beauvoir and Irigaray: Philosophizing Postfeminism in Contemporary Popular Culture, 2015*, written by Tegan Zimmerman, the author analyzes postfeminism's two main themes: sexuality and equality with the help of theorists Simone de Beauvoir and Luce Irigaray's constructions of feminist philosophical theories. Zimmerman highlights and criticizes neoliberal aspects of postfeminism. She discusses the anti-feminist and neoliberal aspects of postfeminism which assume that we live in a society that is no longer trapped in the constraints of a patriarchal system and women have achieved equality. The researcher highlights the inaccurate representation of a society that is shown to be no longer misogynistic and the 'post' in feminism feeds this idea of women having succeeded in the fight against patriarchy and inequality. Zimmerman argues that under such assumptions, it would mean that issues like organizational hierarchy, wage-gap, etc., have gotten resolved and women are no longer oppressed, when it is in fact not the case at all. Postfeminism uses empowerment and individualism to further commodify women and make them slaves to the consumer culture. He also refers to several other theorists and their views on postfeminism, thus concluding that "A more accurate characterization is that postfeminism critically engages with feminism which is an idea and movement dedicated to combatting and contesting patriarchy and inequality" (Zimmerman). Zimmerman highlights Irigaray's argument and explains that she talks mainly about the mother daughter relationship and the embracement of genealogy in order for women to highlight and sustain a distinct position in the society, regardless of men alienating them. Irigaray claims that this mother daughter genealogy can help women attain an individual identity. When women have to gain the position of a sexually desiring subject as well, Whitford writes, "the central condition would be a maternal genealogy, so that the daughter could situate herself in her identity with respect to her mother. The maternal should have a spiritual and divine dimension, and not be relegated merely to the carnal" (Whitford 159). On the other hand, Beauvoir stresses upon achieving a non-feminine self, and explains that gender is only construction of a patriarchal system that wants to give the male gender a dominant position in all spheres, and present him as a 'can do all' gender. Beauvoir says that women can be equal to men and participate in each field as an equal to man. Together, Beauvoir and Irigaray bring forth a woman who does not commodify herself and others, does not become a mere consumer of the culture and gain only a feminine carnal version of herself, but rather she maintains a maternal genealogy as

opposed to the hierarchies of the system, and becomes an empowered woman by rejecting the postfeminist culture that encapsulates a woman's identity as only the one who maintains a carnal feminine subject. The postfeminist manifestation of objectifying the man, analyzed previously, is then debunked by the author through Beauvoir's and Irigaray's feminist philosophical theories.

In contrast to postfeminism's connection with neoliberalism, as discussed in the previous research, another view that is connected in defining the concept of postfeminism is brought forth in the article *Post-feminism and Popular Culture, 2007*, in which British theorist Angela McRobbie argues that postfeminism progressively describes feminism showing that equal rights have been accomplished and this new version of feminism holds the belief that there is no longer a need for feminism to be highlighted or women's rights to be fought for. McRobbie gives the example of the novel *Bridget Jones' Diary, 1996* arguing that postfeminism focuses on the study of different directions in the feminist academy along with highlighting the rejection of feminism by postfeminism within similar academic context, by women who are its subjects and whose aim is to only gain sexual recognition. McRobbie says that feminism can only be explored and taken into account if it is regarded as having already passed away. She refers to Judith Butler's book *Antigone's Claim, 2000*, through which she defines postfeminism as double entanglement. Here, the concept of double entanglement explains and explores the ways in which feminism is portrayed and is being mocked at. She writes, "Double entanglement consists of the co-existence of neo-conservative values in relation to gender, sexuality and family life." (McRobbie 255). In this research, I have shown how postfeminism does not reject feminism, but rather acts as a separate sensibility, neither feminist nor anti-feminist. With the help of themes that construct a postfeminist sensibility, I have analyzed main female characters in *City of Girls* and *Chasing Harry Winston* to study how these women are influenced by the constructed gender norms. I have also shown how chick lit portrays women's identity to be majorly defined as a "bodily property", separating it from significant feminist notions which represent female gender as a "social, intellectual and psychological one" (Gill, "Postfeminist Media Culture"150).

The chick lit fiction which mainly includes books from western authors, there seems to be a gap in identifying postfeminism and its scope. In the article *For Western girls only? Post-feminism as transnational culture, 2015*, the author Simidele

Dosekun argues that considerable portion of literature on postfeminism involves the “Western” world and variously conceptualizes postfeminism as “Western culture” (Dosekun). He argues that, as a result of that, feminist cultural scholars have not sufficiently imagined, theorized, or empirically researched the possibility of postfeminism in non-Western cultural contexts. By briefly reviewing what has been said in literature about postfeminism and the non-West, and by putting this in dialogue with transnational feminist cultural scholarship, the article makes case for a transnational analytic and methodological approach to the critical study of postfeminism. The term transnational may refer to a critical mode of thinking across borders and thus thinking across multiple intersections, forms, and sites of difference at once. “To think transnationally is to think of what Grewal and Kaplan (1994) call “scattered hegemonies”” (Dosekun). The article argues that such an approach provides an understanding of postfeminism as a transnationally circulating culture, and thus can better account for the fact that the culture speaks to not only with women in the West but also with others elsewhere. The article concludes by outlining what it means and could afford feminist cultural scholars to work with a new conceptual view of postfeminism as transnational culture. This view of postfeminism is yet another theory that is used as a criticism of postfeminism to be an agenda fixed for the western women, whether elite or middle class. However, in my research, the depiction of western women in the respective novels is focused upon and analyzed because of the origin of feminism that exists in the west and due to the feminist ideas, which are also being looked at and practiced in non-western cultures. An in-depth analysis of western context is a need in order to understand and find the lesions existing in postfeminism.

2.2. Postfeminism in Academic Discourse

In connection to the idea of neoliberalism is also the element of consumer culture. The chick lit genre specifically incorporates consumer spending with women gaining transformations by enhancing their appearance. This postfeminist woman becomes valuable as soon as she gains a new appearance. A famous example of this is the famous novel which the author talks about in his article *A Postfeminist Approach to the Female Empowerment Contradictions in “The Devil Wears Prada”, 2021* written by Por Edua. The researcher analyzes famous novel *The Devil Wears Prada, 2003*, written by Lauren Weisberger, and analyzes it under a postfeminist lens, using

Rosalind Gill's elements of Postfeminist Sensibility. Edua writes about the aspects in which fashion associated women are embodied to be empowered and successful under the condition that they fulfill requirements of consumer culture, of having an elite womanhood which defines their value as a human. The article talks about how the main character Andy who is shown from the start to be passive, burdened by self-loath and self-doubt, comes to gain confidence, a new sense of self and discipline simply by adopting to wear branded clothes and revealing more skin. In the hint of a second, Andy gets rid of everything that her character was shown to be lacking. Edua writes, "In less than two minutes Andy Sachs went from unconfident, anxious and disastrous employee to a calm, purposeful woman exuding confidence only by wearing some make up and a new pair of Chanel boots" (Edua). The book ends with the female character going back to a traditional lifestyle while still managing to be successful and desirable and opting to choose a job that would not interfere in her relationship with her neglecting her boyfriend. This contradictory nature of postfeminism is explored and highlighted by the researcher while making a comparison of this 'new feminism' with feminist ideas.

The chick lit fiction widely incorporates the theme of woman empowerment. The analysis of this theme upon which women's portrayal is centralized is necessary to understand the postfeminist woman. In the article by Alina Ilief-Martinescu, titled *Postfeminist Fiction in Chick Lit Novels, 2015*, the author analyzes from a postfeminist standpoint, three Chick Lit novels: *The Secret Dreamworld of a Shopaholic* (2000), *Bridget Jones' Diary* (1996), and *The Devil Wears Prada* (2003). Ilief explains the means through which Chick Lit fiction makes the audience come to terms with the idea of female empowerment and consumerism. The female protagonists portray exaggerated consumerist behaviors and tend to pursue material goods to indicate social status. This dependency relationship on the material goods is what depicts details of these characters, weaknesses of the characters in terms of dependence on such a lifestyle is shown as their strength that dictates the choices they make in their lives. In describing the lifestyle of the characters of the respective postfeminist novels, the author highlights, "Consumerism and hedonism are key words that describe the lives of characters in this novel in which most of the characters tend to pursue material goods to indicate social status. These goods thus come to define a classy life" (Ilief-Martinescu). Ilief-Martinescu highlights the agenda

of postfeminism to be a backlash against feminism, and in doing so, it also promotes the consumer culture of neo-liberal societies.

In contrast to the research carried out in this thesis, with the analysis of postfeminist female characters and several specific themes, the article *Chick Lit: Themes and Studies, 2014* by Yingru Lu analyzes the genre of chick lit and only two of the themes, of marriage and sex. It mentions the beginning of chick lit fiction with novels *Sex and the City, 1996* and *Bridget Jones' Diary, 1996*. While mentioning the covers of chick lit books, LU says that they usually involve the clothing items, make-up, accessories, and female body parts. The chick-lit themes mostly revolve around sex and marriage. This can also be compared to Weisberger's *Chasing Harry Winston, 2008* in which the main topics of the novel seem to be finding the right man and getting married to him along with the sexual encounters of women in which their beauty and body parts are the main focus of a man's gaze. However, the respective book is not limited to the theme of only marriage and sex. In this article, Lu also mentions consumerism to be a major part of Chick Lit novels, which supports previously mentioned analyses of the concept of postfeminism. She distinguishes how such passive and shallow representations of women embed the inequality between male and female gender in the patriarchal society. However, LU does not completely disregard chick lit and emphasizes on the importance of this genre, stating that "The subjects addressed in Chick Lit may be deemed by some highbrow critics as fussing about trivialities, but certainly they have an intimate connection with the new era women are living in and the representation of these new conditions has its value that is worth exploring" (LU). In my research, the notion of female identity and "femininity" with their relation with subjectification and individualism bring forth key details necessary in understanding postfeminism.

The relationship between femininity and female identity have also been examined in my research. However, while highlighting just the notion female identity, the author of the thesis entitled *The Construction of Postfeminist Women's Identity by Consuming Lifestyles: A Study of Four Chick Lit Novels, 2009* deems consumerism to be the sole creator of the female identity. Ruth Karyanto references four chick lit novels and discusses postfeminist women's identity. The author talks about what creates a postfeminist woman's identity and calls the notions of education and occupation to be its main driver, along with consumer spending. She mentions that

without work, postfeminist women are unable to define themselves. They lead single mechanical lives in which their work is central to who they are. Women's lives are analyzed to be revolving around apparent beauty and success in work while there is no naked emotional and physically vulnerable space left in their lives. From being successful at work to being the consumer woman, chick lit postfeminist woman is forsaking her originality to consumerist products and is only concerned about her career. The consumption of commodities shown by these characters can be regarded as their self-fulfilment through the goods they purchase or display. This idea emerges as if to display someone's wealth through the purchase of goods" (Karyanto). Karyanto also draws postfeminist women's major life problems which include their single life status and the maintenance of their female body parts. Insufficiency and single life status are drawn out to be playing a central problem in women's lives. The author writes that women feel insufficient in terms of feeling wanted and hence turn towards consumer spending in order to feed their need of living a luxurious lifestyle apparently making them happy. She further mentions that women who consume more commodities find themselves to be worthy of praise and admiration, along with male approval. Hence, women are shown to be more satisfied when they consume more. The research that I have carried out does not only shows the consumer behavior, but also highlights and analyzes how the themes of subjectification, individualism, choice and empowerment play out in the selected works.

The feminist female identity is analyzed in the thesis entitled *Shopping and Female Identity in Sophie Kinsella's Confessions of a Shopaholic and Shopaholic Takes Manhattan, 2015* by Yingru Lu. The author theorizes "shopping" and analyzes female identity in two chick lit novels by the bestselling author Sophie Kinsella. Lu mentions the theorist Jean Baudrillard who has analyzed the environment of shopping centers to be carefree, and exempted from disorder. They provide an environment that engulfs the consumer and there is nothing to distract or disturb them in this dreamland. Lu further mentions the French philosopher, theorist, and sociologist Jean Baudrillard, who critically analyzes shopping and its relation to gender and to a woman's identity. He notices the "woman to be a consumer and the man to be a producer of the patriarchal society" (Baudrillard). Baudrillard describes how a woman gains power in a shopping center where there are no external factors submitting her to their dominance. Lu analyzes how the protagonist Rebecca's identity is being created

through the shopping experience when she comes to define herself by what she wears and how she looks, making it a valuable leisure and pursuit for women to prioritize. The author writes, "...the shopping space functions as an Adamless utopia where modern professional women are allowed to unburden themselves of daily apprehensions and release their identity anxiety, thus contributes to the recognition of the self" (Lu). The cultural theorist Rob Shields disregards shopping to be taken solely as a "leisure activity" but rather defines it as a "cultural event" and a "performance" through which "commodities are displayed by the consumers" (Shields). Whoever possesses these commodities is deemed worthy of praise, becoming a modified version of themselves. Baudrillard explains how shopping then is not done because the goods need to be used, but because they gain a "sign-value" (Baudrillard). Hence, women define themselves by their appearance and by the things they consume.

In conducting a study of chick lit novels, the children's fairytales also hold a significant position in the analysis of the creation of female identity and the portrayal of women and girls. The article *Chick Lit: A Postfeminist Fairy Tale, 2013*, written by Georgina C. Isbister analyzes the fairytales from the past. e.g., *Cinderella, 1968*; *Sleeping Beauty, 1697*; *Little Red Riding Hood, 17th Century*; and compares them to the contemporary chick lit genre of postfeminist fairytales. While analyzing the quest for women in chick lit and their transformation of self, Isbister discusses the problematic direction this quest takes when glorification of the self is actually the commodification of womanhood, and the consumption of consumer culture. A fairytale narrative is being investigated in this genre. The author analyzes the postfeminist fairy tale genre and highlights the theme of romance in which the female subject needs to be re-defined. While talking about McRobbie's notion of 'double entanglement', Isbister discusses the neoliberal woman's individualism who has to have it all: a feminine consumer identity and an empowered woman who excels in both her professional and personal life. This individualism is marked by having complete freedom, doing whatever a woman wishes. However, the paper argues that this is only the apparent image being sold to women, as they are made consumers and feminism is further commodified. Isbister refers to Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra's book *Interrogating Postfeminism: Gender and the Politics of Popular Culture, 2007*, and quotes, "Tasker and Negra argue that postfeminist culture has largely

commodified feminism through an image of woman as empowered consumer, positing both their public and private lives as centrally directed by ‘freedom of choice’” (Tasker & Negra, Isbister).

In comparison to significance of the analysis of fairytales from the past, the contemporary chick lit fiction, another important part of this fiction are the contemporary biofictions written by women authors. The journal article *FEMINIST TO POSTFEMINIST contemporary biofictions by and about women artists, 2017*, written by Julia Novak discusses two novels: *Clara, 2002* by Janice Galloway and *Exit the Actress, 2011* by Priya Parmar. Both novels exhibit the transition from feminism to postfeminism, highlighting how women writers describe the ways in which they have to repress their emotions in order to conform to being a person that fits societal standards. The books also describe how women writers struggle to speak freely, even while they are writing about themselves. The researcher analyzes these narratives of femininity through a postfeminist lens. Novak writes how the books highlight the domestic duties of women and their dominant portrayals, relating to the contemporary female versions of women represented in chick lit and media; *Bridget Jones’ Diary, 1996* is taken as a comparison with *Exit the Actress, 2011* main character, who also writes in her diary in a similar manner. Novak also compares the consumer culture followed by females in these bio fictions with the postfeminist chick lit that builds its characters around the same theme. The author however asks her audience to take both the novels out of their feminist context and postfeminist ideas, in order to observe that “the two novels analysed demonstrate that biographical fictions about historical women, although concerned ostensibly with past lives, can serve as a barometer of shifting gender discourses of the twenty-first century” (Novak).

Postfeminist fiction includes many bestselling books which indicates the huge measure of audience it has. However, the contradictory nature of defining postfeminism has kept the audience in the dark. One of these bestselling books is referenced in Anthea Taylor’s article ‘*The urge towards love is an urge towards (un)death’: Romance, masochistic desire and postfeminism in the Twilight novels, 2012* in which the author analyzes female individualism, one of the core elements of postfeminist sensibility. The female main character Bella Swan is one who is defined and analyzed by Taylor as an objectified woman from the book series *Twilight, 2005*,

written by Stephanie Meyer. Taylor describes Bella's character as the one who does not have an identity separate from her vampire boyfriend and the hero of trilogy, Edward Cullen. She is portrayed as a fragile feminine character who is objectified under the cover of this erotica. Bella's individual self is completely absent, and she only defines herself through her association with Edward, whom she allows to even kill her in the name of love. Meyer shows Edward evidently treating Bella as an object that is his property, which is eroticized along with him being shown as the most intellectual and ideal man, while Bella's identity outside of her relationship is null. The article references to Angela McRobbie and Diane Negra's critiques on such postfeminist aspects. Negra (2009) mentions the postfeminist features from the book; i.e., "focus on the feminine sexualized self and consumer culture" (Negra). Taylor writes, "This exaggerated sense of her somatic limitations can also be seen as a product of how she is positioned as a teenage female body, hyper-visible and subject to the male gaze" (Taylor). Bella's masochism invites the male gaze to objectify her being and control her while she believes it to be love. The author eroticizes such patriarchal notions while further embedding them into the minds of her vast female audience.

A significant aspect to be highlighted and analyzed while investigating consumerism in postfeminism is the connection of consumerism with the ways in which it is commercialized. One such significant aspect is the element of spiritual consumerism. In the thesis entitled *Elizabeth Gilbert's Eat, Pray, Love: How Post-Feminism Serves Spiritual Consumerism* written by Sebnem Cebe, a critical analysis of Gilbert's autobiographical novel *Eat, Pray, Love, 2006* is carried out. The article analyzes the main theme of Gilbert's novel: spirituality. Cebe critiques postfeminist aspects of the novel that turn woman empowerment and spirituality into consumerism. The researcher explains that empowerment and spirituality are represented as products that can be bought, and any enlightenment that one can achieve is through consumption. From this perspective, all responsibility is laid upon the individual on working towards becoming more i.e., gaining self-worth by spending money freely and purchasing and accepting an exclusive persona with the help of products that help you acquire and maintain it. Cebe writes, "Spirituality becomes a product, and the spiritual subject its consumer" (Cebe). Through this, several external factors are made to be a necessity in acquiring spiritual awakening. The author mentions how such self-

help books make the individual solely in control of his/her well-being, and such post-feminist books further embed the neoliberal ideas and practices whose object and subject is the feminine gender. The article brings forth the combination of postfeminism and spiritual consumerism to represent female emancipation and self-recognition through them. It states several definitions of how the term 'gender' is defined by different theorists, and it has been defined by historians to be more of a social classification than as a biological difference. Such traditional and male-hegemonic structure is what Gilbert also brings forward in her autobiographical novel. Regardless of leaving her husband in order to become a free individual who does not want anyone to dictate her, Gilbert's journey involves main influences by only the men she meets in her journey; her spiritual friend whom she takes as her advisor for everything who gives her a "sense of security", his Guru by whom she is immensely influenced without having ever met him, and her boyfriend Felipe who treats her like a child to which she specifies that that is what she had wanted all along, for a man to take care of her. Hence, researcher Cebe finds out that the author of *Eat, Pray, Love, 2006*, not only accepts the role of conventional stereotypes, but also depends on them to bring her fulfillment. While women and herself are only represented as consumers of good food and expensive lingerie, promoting the stereotypes and agendas that have commercialized feminism and made women buy it in order to become 'awakened postfeminists'.

Contrary to the commercialized nature postfeminism, is an entirely different stance brought forth by Susan Faludi, which deems radical feminism to be responsible for the creation of postfeminism. In the thesis *Chick lit: the new face of postfeminist fiction, 2006*, Michele M. Glasburgh analyzes ten chick lit books using Susan Faludi's Backlash Theory referred through her book *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women, 1991*. The ten chick lit books being referred to in this thesis are:

- *Dumping Billy*, Olivia Goldsmith (2004)
- *Getting Over It*, Anna Maxted (2000)
- *The Girl's Guide to Hunting and Fishing*, Melissa Bank (1999)
- *Girls' Poker Night*, Jill A. Davis (2002)
- *Good in Bed*, Jennifer Weiner (2001)
- *Jemima J*, Jane Green (1999)

- *Sushi for Beginners*, Marian Keyes (2003)
- *Bridget Jones's Diary*, Helen Fielding (1998)
- *Confessions of a Shopaholic*, Sophie Kinsella (2002)
- *The Devil Wears Prada*, Lauren Weisberger (2003)

Glasburgh analyzes these books using five postfeminist characteristics brought forth by Faludi: “1) negative reaction to second wave feminism, 2) focus on the individual instead of a collective sisterhood, 3) desire for more traditional femininity through domesticity, consumerism, romance, and motherhood, 4) female identity crisis causing fears of a man shortage, a loudly ticking biological clock, and career burnout, and 5) feelings of anxiety over ability to make the correct future decisions” (Glasburgh) (Faludi). Faludi deems feminism to be responsible for creating postfeminism. The author analyzes that feminism brought forward many new choices for which due to which more confusions originated, and women turned towards postfeminism. Going back on the road to traditional femininity hence seems more convenient to women when it is disguised under the “makeover paradigm” (Gill 16). This makeover paradigm portrays women to have become more powerful by incorporating beauty ideals. Glasburgh further states that due to women being loaded with multiple choices, feminist movements and women acting against inequality together has diminished. Hence, working only on one’s individual self is the pursuit of every chick lit postfeminist woman. The research that I have conducted analyzes postfeminism using Rosalind Gill’s concept of Postfeminist Sensibility and brings forth an in-depth analysis of the female characters using her themes of subjectification, individualism, and femininity as a bodily property. Furthermore, the female identity and her portrayal of femininity is also analyzed in order to bring forth her motivations and limitations deemed to be her dominant traits.

The article *Analyzing George Bernard Shaw’s Portrayal of Women in the Light of Postfeminist Theory, 2021* written by Dr. Shahid Abbas, Dr. Ijaz Asghar and Dr. Qamar Hussain, addresses and examines different opinions on the playwright George Bernard Shaw’s writings and their portrayal of women with how Islam represents women. The authors write about postfeminism that it regards feminism to have been over, “no longer needed in the modern times” (Abbas., et al 440). Feminism is however, not taken as redundant, but rather analyzed critically. Hence,

postfeminism is defined as a concept that shows women being equal to men, along with celebrating their domesticity. The paper outlines postfeminism in the following points (Cameron) (Abbas., et al 440) :

- The postfeminist does not believe in the essentialist nature of gender, rather gender is performative.
- In postfeminism, there is a constant urge to retain both aspects of life by integrating career and domesticity. Women are no longer depicted as feeble creatures. (Cameron) (Abbas., et al. 440).

While criticizing feminism, the writers highlight how feminism preaches women and men to be rivals, than equals. They call the relationship of Islam and feminism to be an “ideological conflict”, while calling the shift from feminism to postfeminism “‘powerless to empowered’ women in academia”. They further state that through postfeminism, the Islamic idea of womanhood is shown rather truly and in its complete form. The article mentions Bernard Shaw’s book *Pygmalion*. The play’s protagonist Eliza is portrayed as a postfeminist woman who is against the stereotypical roles of women, and wants to contribute to the society. Shaw’s plays highlight the gender inequalities and reject the patriarchal oppression of women. Abbas., et al analyze the postfeminist woman and write, “A postfeminist woman is a strong and educated woman who performs her duties actively by maintaining a balance between career and domesticity. Household chores are not drudgery or monotonous ways of life; in fact, there is a celebration of drudgery in postfeminists. Furthermore, a postfeminist woman is not a feeble creature who is always looking for support from her husband. She is a strong woman who is performing her duties actively and contributing towards the advancement of her life” (Abbas., et al. 441). In conclusion, the analysis does not entirely reject feminism but promote the idea that the feminist movement is not over and is still much needed, for it should create harmony between both genders and gain equality for women. The study also concludes postfeminism to be creating the kind of woman who is balanced, who does not detest household chores or taking care of her husband, and neither ignores her career. The article compares the postfeminist woman to the Islamic woman and highlights the similarities between them which have been brought forward through Shaw’s writings.

The article *A Postfeminist Criticism on Caryl Churchill's Vinegar Tom and Fen, 2019* written by Abdalla Fatah Balu and Saman Salah Hassan, analyzes Caryl Churchill's plays *Vinegar Tom* and *Fen*, from a postfeminist lens. The authors refer to several postfeminist standpoints, used as the framework to conduct this study: Tasker and Negra, Gamble, Denison, and Ann Brooks. The paper defines postfeminism as a movement working in bringing men and women reconcile and helping in giving true liberation to women. It also refers to a research of Kent State University and establishes that postfeminism "attempts to unite the sexes than separating them" (Balu & Hassan 161, 162). The paper briefly analyzes family and marriage, parenting, generations and collaboration, masculinity and femininity, work and domesticity, victimhood, individuality, and sexuality. A comparison of women's contemporary lifestyle and the way that they were treated in the past (17th Century) is being made, stating that the past has treated women in a grotesque manner, as seen in the play *Vinegar Tom* and in the play *Fen*, in which women of 17th Century have been hanged, tortured and burned to death. The plays also portray a promoted version of postfeminist women which shows women to be freely choosing to experience their sexuality, pleasure, individuality and independence. The analysis also brings forth the importance of family, motherhood and career, defining them as postfeminist features and a step forward from the failing state of feminism. It concludes that "woman's life was dreadful and unsatisfactory in the past and women have to celebrate the current developed conditions, in which they can follow their desires, act as sexual beings, autonomous individuals, and above all as human beings in a harmonious correspondence with the male counterpart" (Balu & Hassan 181). Hence, the article advocates and highlights the postfeminist features through analysis of Churchill's plays, and emphasizes on the importance of a postfeminist awakening for women.

Another perspective in defining the relationship of postfeminism with feminism is viewing postfeminism to be anti-feminist, which is contrary to the belief that postfeminism is a step forward in woman emancipation (Butler). The former view of postfeminism is analyzed in the article "*Sex and the Single Girl*" in *Post-Feminism, 2001*, L.S Kim talks about how feminism is defined and characterized in the contemporary US television and how a feminist discourse is directed literally and metaphorically with strong and independent women protagonists in the postfeminist era. Kim argues that if postfeminism involves "questions of sexuality, subjectivity and

identity” (Kim) then how can it demonstrate the character of Ally from the show *Ally McBeal, 1997* as a woman who is successful and empowered but also anti-feminist. *Ally McBeal, 1997* is made popular in a feminist discourse in which it is acceptable to be an independent woman or a “pro-woman” but not feminist (Kim). In such shows, the liberated status of women and societal views and structures are constructed and made-up by male authors which they represent in the context of culture in which feminism has come to be called as a term that is immoral or disgusting. On the other hand, the same authors show female characters to be independent, having freedom to choose in terms of what they wish to wear, career choices, education, remaining single and free, along with appraisal for them for being heterosexual. Contrary to this freedom, the unmarried and single woman is being questioned and their individuality is being examined in a way that they are still being shown upset about their life’s purpose as they do not have a male life partner. In the new millennium, liberty of choice, along with excessive desire and freedom is embodied leading towards despair and dysfunction and an endless search for having a desirable male life companion. Such social constructs are shown in a way that they become normalized than being questioned and criticized. In my research, through the analysis of book *Chasing Harry Winston, 2008*, this stereotyped and normalized social construct of the female gender and her portrayal of traditional femininity combined with the neoliberal woman have been highlighted and analyzed. The phenomenon of postfeminism has been critically evaluated under women’s idea of independence and freedom presented in the chick lit discourse, along with the postfeminist features that include women’s identity as a bodily property, sexualization and subjectification; including their subservience to societal norms; that have come to redefine these terms.

In parallel to the previous research, the comparison of feminist and postfeminist themes (as available) is also essential while analyzing the concept of postfeminism. The article *Twenty-Something Girls, 2012 v. Thirty-Something Sex and The City, 1998 Women*, written by Meredith Nash and Ruby Grant, compares a show and a novel centering on the portrayal of postfeminist themes in both women-centered television series. Lena Dunham’s *Girls, 2012* explores numerous feminist themes, showcasing the life of a young white woman in US contemporary society. Both Nash and Grant ask the question of how postfeminism is deployed in the series. Although both shows portray the postfeminist culture, the ways of representing sexualities,

reproductive choice and feminine embodiment are different. Nash and Grant argue that *Girls, 2012* presents a new and different approach in representing the lives of US women on television, recasting, and organizing in a novel way the existing conceptualizations of postfeminism. They propose that postfeminism may then be used to describe the author's version of it; a version that provides a more mature and deeper insight into the concept of postfeminism, that is different from the older version presented in Candace Bushnell's *Sex and the City, 1998*. However, this comparison does not show a lot of difference, as both series have the same notions of self-sexualization and self-branding; one slightly lesser in the consumption of such lifestyle than the other. The research that I have conducted highlights the specific distinct themes laid forth by Gill, separated from any feminist or anti-feminist lens, which are explored and analyzed as part of chick lit and of postfeminist representation of women.

While examining postfeminist themes, the transformation of a woman into a consumer is one of the important factors to be analyzed when chick lit's vast female audience is considered. In the thesis *Marketing Postfeminism Through Social Media: Fan Identification and Fashion on Pretty Little Liars, 2014*, Anna Donatelle talks about the drama series *Pretty Little Liars, 2010*, the television show that targets the young female audience, depicting postfeminist themes such as consumerism and female empowerment through commercialization of the female products. It presents the portrayal of a girl who is considered a protagonist no matter what she does because she fulfills all the beauty standards and performs the traditional gender role successfully. The thesis talks of the ways in which television shows promote these postfeminist ideologies. Donatelle argues that as the network has trademarked itself as a place for futuristic programming; it has used digital platforms to make *Pretty Little Liars, 2014* a show mandatory for women to learn about shopping, beauty, which define their identity and femininity. Donatelle analyzes the ways in which young women construct their identities and how, through the celebrities and costuming especially, the show inspires audiences both as a "cultural phenomenon and an object of consumption" (Donatelle). Donatelle views postfeminism as an agenda that promotes commercialization of the body and women lose their individual identities as they start viewing themselves as objects and act as products of a patriarchal society, without recognizing any self-worth or gaining any intellectual growth. Their identities

are defined by the brands they wear and how beautiful they are, eventually leading them towards a depressed and purposeless life.

The analysis of Gilbert's previous bestselling novel and its portrayal of feminism is necessary in understanding her portrayal of women. The researcher Annabel Gutterman discusses feminism in her article *Elizabeth Gilbert's City of Girls Embraces Women's Sexuality in a World That Doesn't*, 2019. She writes about Elizabeth Gilbert's previous novel *Eat, Pray, Love*, 2006 and how it "drew criticism for its dogmatic brand of feminism" (Gutterman). Gutterman disregards such criticism on Gilbert's portrayal of feminism and talks about *City of Girls*, 2019 as a novel that has led women towards sexual freedom and towards considering pleasure to be nothing as disgraceful. She talks of the novel being representative of women recognizing and embracing their desires, (Gutterman). The current research focuses on seeing with a critical lens the theme of postfeminism that is constructing women's individualism, empowerment, and freedom in terms of portraying them in a sexually appealing manner that is used to define their freedom of choice and self-worth in the society.

Through Rosalind Gill's concept of *Postfeminist Sensibility*, this research highlights subjectification of the female characters in *City of Gils*, 2019 and *Chasing Harry Winston*, 2008, through which they are represented as sexualized feminine subjects, practicing freedom of choice under the guise of individualism. The identity of the female characters is defined through their body, which grants them autonomy and power over others. The research also carries out the exploration of the notion of 'femininity', and the ways in which femininity is shown through postfeminist characters in chick lit discourse. It investigates the relationship between femininity, female body, and identity. The significant "shift" from "objectification to subjectification" are also analyzed to understand the formation of "assertive" female subject and her exercising of "choice". Furthermore, the research examines connection between individualism and female subjectivity, to identify how power operates and how the sexualization of women portrays them as empowered subjects.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Method

The information that has been collected from the two novels and analyzed in this research is carried out through application of Textual Analysis by Alan McKee. This analysis highlights genre and context of the given texts along with the interpretation of these texts in a systematic manner. In his book, Alan McKee gives a basic introduction to textual analysis. He emphasizes on the importance of texts and highlights the foundations in light of which they stand. He also focuses on the interpretation of texts in a manner that would not claim that a certain text does or does not reflect a fixed reality. Joss Utting writes in his article *Mr McGee, Alan McKee and their textual analysis tree, 2016*, that while analyzing a text it can be noticed often that it goes against the subject matter or excludes certain details and does not provide us with a complete picture, however; it cannot be seen as representing the text incorrectly. It must still be considered as showing the reality that we may be unaware of even if it does not show a particular truth (Utting). The method of textual analysis shows how the world can be seen through analyses of others (Utting). He writes, “Instead of approaching text analysis as what, we must cognitively shift to the concept of *who, when, where, and why.*” (Utting).

3.2. Theoretical Framework

Postfeminism is defined in various ways and through various lenses, consisting of many contradictions. For the purpose of this research, I have taken Rosalind Gill’s concept of Postfeminist Sensibility, which includes the themes of subjectification, individualism, and femininity as bodily property, choice and empowerment, which have been taken through which postfeminism and female characters are analyzed in chick lit novels. She highlights the modern sexualization of discourses and refers to chick lit discourses that revolve around female protagonists and target female audience. Here sexualisation refers to proliferation of discourses about sex and sexuality, women’s identity and femininity being defined through their

erotic representations; subjectification is the representation of women as sexual dominant subjects; and individualism is choice and empowerment. Gill presents these themes which combine to make a postfeminist sensibility, which refers to the idea that postfeminism can be characterized as a set of behavioral traits derived as a response to feminist and neoliberal cultural stimuli.

The phenomenon of postfeminism has its origin in the 1990s. The term has gained popularity as it highlights several contradictions in how women are represented. It brings a sexualised version of the female gender who is fully empowered because the subject has a sensual body and a bold-self, hence capable of doing anything (Gill, “Postfeminist Media Culture” 150). This sexualization of the female body is portrayed as empowerment and freedom. Postfeminism is analyzed and conceptualized in various ways by different theorists. From Susan Faludi’s view of feminism being the cause of postfeminism, defined in her book *Backlash*, to Judith Butler’s assertion that women’s mis-understanding of feminism creates postfeminism which shows empowered women who do not critically evaluate themselves but only deem themselves to be worthy subjects, letting the patriarchal inequality prevail. Hence, postfeminism remains an ambivalent concept which is not clearly and solely defined, separate from feminism. The theorist that I have used in my research, Rosalind Gill, is a British feminist, cultural theorist, and a sociologist. She comes to define postfeminism through her specifically characterized concept of Postfeminist Sensibility; which brings about multiple themes that create this sensibility. Gill precisely mentions that postfeminism is “neither feminism, nor anti feminism, however an entanglement of both ideas, and therefore here it is created as a distinct sensibility constituting interrelated themes.” (“Postfeminist Media Culture” 161). Hence, postfeminism is defined by Gill as a response to feminism, and not as a backlash, an encounter with ‘difference’, or a step forward in feminism.

3.2.1. Empowered Female Subject

Postfeminism has gained popularity especially after the fourth wave of feminism, with its origin situated in the 1990s. This theoretical concept is widely used by different writers who wish to show empowered women who have free will and a distinct individualism. Gill talks about two versions of empowered female subjects: one is the postfeminist subject and the other is the psychological subject that is demanded by neoliberalism. She points out how both the subjects are closely similar

to each other and yet the postfeminist subject is deemed unique, having complete authority. Postfeminism shows female subjects having free will, who are pursuing their desires to feel good. The theme of “pleasing oneself” is found to be the most common theme employed in postfeminist chick lit novels (Gill, “Postfeminist Media Culture” 153). This empowered subject’s freedom is defined in terms of choice; the choice to dress, appear and live however a woman wants to live.

As many different perspectives and definitions are at present in debate while defining postfeminism. Feminists like Angela McRobbie consider that postfeminism talks about only some women who are beautiful and sexy, embedding all kinds of prejudices, (McRobbie). McRobbie writes,

...by means of the tropes of freedom and choice which are now inextricably connected with the category of “young women,” feminism is decisively aged and made to seem redundant. Feminism is cast into the shadows, where at best it can expect to have some afterlife, where it might be regarded ambivalently by those young women who must in more public venues stake a distance from it, for the sake of social and sexual recognition. (McRobbie 255)

According to some critics and journalists, it deals with creating and further embedding the traditional and politicized notions that exist in the neoliberal system. Gill talks about gender and postfeminism through a lens that gives a critical insight into the politics of the theory and the lesions that have been made into the theory, (Gill, “Postfeminist Media Culture” 164). In the *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, she published the article *Postfeminist media culture, Elements of a sensibility* in which she introduces the concept of *Postfeminist Sensibility* and analyzes the postfeminist school of thought that is ignorantly used by writers of chick lit and propagated by media. Through *Postfeminist Sensibility*, Gill talks about representation of a sexualized neoliberal identity of women. While addressing the theory of postfeminism, Gill says that postfeminism is considered either a criticism on feminism or anti-feminism, scholars like E. J Hall and Marnie Salupo Rodriguez discard the theory of postfeminism, calling the whole narrative a propaganda against the cause of feminism and against women (Hall & Rodriguez). As a result of conceptualization of postfeminism as a sensibility, Gill brings forth the sexualized version of femininity and analyzes these sexualized subjects that exist in postfeminist media culture and in chick lit. She relates postfeminism and neoliberalism with the

elements presented in postfeminist sensibility, completely distinct and unique. It is an identity that is not anti-feminist, rather, it shows the traditional version of femininity in a way that deems only physically appealing women as powerful free agents, free from any societal set standards and from the effects of consumer culture.

According to Gill, “the extreme emphasis on women's bodies as the site of femininity is how the contemporary culture is being universally sexualized” (“Postfeminist Media Culture” 152). Here, by sexualization, she refers to the propagation of chick lit discourse and media culture emphasized on female sexuality. Women’s diverse identity is created by showcasing their appearance in a sensual manner and the subject is shown as one that is always ready to transform its body in the only acceptable form. Gill writes about how the media documents women’s bodies sexually regardless of the context (“Postfeminist Media Culture” 150).

3.2.2. Source of Identity & Power/Authority in Chick Lit

Rosalind Gill talks about the source of women’s power through which their subjective identity is created in chick lit. The Postfeminist Sensibility highlights the sexual norms for women which are once acquired by them or they conform themselves to acquire these norms, women are shown to have achieved power over everything. A woman’s identity is defined through the sexualized characteristics that she possesses or works to possess. The postfeminist woman has authority over not only men but other women as well, when she meets the definition of femininity that is driven out to create a sexual female body and lifestyle. This sensual identity and the definition of femininity is created with the combination of postfeminist female figure and the neoliberal values (Gill, “Postfeminist Media Culture” 157). She says “... on one hand women are presented as active, desiring social subjects, yet on the other they are subject to a level of scrutiny and hostile surveillance that has no historical precedent... there is a powerful resonance between postfeminism and neoliberalism” (Gill, “Postfeminist Media Culture” 163). Gill explains this to be operating at three levels: firstly, postfeminism and neoliberalism both are structured through “a current of individualism” (“Postfeminist Media Culture” 164), hence the idea of political and social gets excluded, along with the individual’s actions being the result of any political or social pressure or any constraint from the outside. The individual therefore becomes solely responsible for everything that they do. On the second hand, the independent, self-governing subject of neoliberalism is similar to the “active, freely

choosing, self-reinventing subject of postfeminism” (Gill, “Postfeminist Media Culture” 164). Gill connects these two points and discerns that “postfeminism is not simply a response to feminism (or a backlash), but also a sensibility that is at least partly constituted through the pervasiveness of neoliberal ideas” (“Postfeminist Media Culture” 164).

She further talks about the notion of individualism and choice, and argues that in the contemporary sexualization of culture, women are not “entirely free agents” exercising freedom of choice as empowered beings, as they are subject to societal standards of erotic beauty with their femininity and identity being defined through this sexualized feminine version of themselves (Gill, “Postfeminist Media Culture” 154). According to Gill, the extreme emphasis on women's bodies as the site of femininity is how the contemporary culture is being universally sexualized, propagated through chick lit and accepted by women while identifying it as individualism and empowerment (“Postfeminist Media Culture” 149). Here, by sexualization, she refers to the propagation of chick lit discourses about sexuality. The British author Brian McNair (2002) calls this the “striptease culture” (McNair) in which girls’ only acceptable distinct individualism is by showcasing their appearance in a sensual manner and the subject is shown as one that is always ready to *choose* to showcase its body as the source of its identity. He writes in his book *Striptease Culture* (2002), “The near-ubiquity of porno-chick provides the bridge between the pronosphere and the public sphere, where sex becomes the subject, in non-explicit contexts, of public debate. These forms of sexual discourse comprise striptease culture in its most literal sense” (McNair 153). Gill writes about how the media documents women’s bodies sexually regardless of the context, no woman is exempt from the examination of bodies in order to define them as valued and portraying success. (“Postfeminist Media Culture” 148)

3.2.3. Shift from Objectification to Subjectification

Rosalind Gill has momentarily emphasized on the shift from objectification to subjectification in order to understand her concept of postfeminist sensibility. She defines subjectification as the representation of women as sexual domineering subjects, instead of being passive objects. This shift highlights how power functions. Gill explains this power dynamic by describing how women were objectified under the male gaze and now they are transforming into the subject, the self that is

egotistical and self-absorbed. Hence, subjectification is in fact re-presentation of sexual objectification. This transformed sexual female subject is shown as an aspiration of women, the subject who is uninfluenced by anything, making her transformation to be an individualistic decision. She talks about the critical shift in chick lit, from objectification to subjectification, and highlights how women are no longer portrayed as objects to men's scrutiny and patriarchy, but as erotic vigorous subjects. This subjectification is justified through emphasis on individualism: choice and empowerment. While talking about postfeminism, Rosalind Gill argues that little to no research has been done on postfeminism, but it is majorly used by writers and the media in an ignorant and careless manner. She defines it as a response to feminism and how this postfeminist stance conveys a distinct sensibility and identifies the themes that would collectively develop a postfeminist sensibility. Gill analyzes how girls are portrayed as dominant or empowered beings by physically representing them as sexual subjects who are subjected to an "intense examination" ("Postfeminist Media Culture" 149).

3.2.4. Individualism

The theme of sexualization further connects with subjectification, individualism and to the notion of femininity as a 'bodily property', where a woman chooses to define her femininity through her body. Gill defines individualism as exercising of choice and embodiment of empowerment. The notion that all female practices are uninfluenced by anything and are freely chosen is fundamental to postfeminist discourse (Gill, "Postfeminist Media Culture" 152). The social and any other influences are excluded, and the individual is shown to be making choices solely themselves. Gill analyzes the ways in which women are portrayed as alluring subjects and their individualism is being defined and justified through freedom of choice that the female characters seem to have. She points out similarities between the individualism of neoliberal subjects and postfeminist subjects, and argues that how can the postfeminist subject's freedom of choice be exactly similar to that of a neoliberal subject. This individualism embraces the traditional gender roles and the culturally defined femininity that it believes women belong to. The authors Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra analyze the concept of postfeminism and its theme of individualism as part of creating the female identity, in their book *Interrogating Postfeminism: Gender and the Politics of Popular Culture*, 2007:

Postfeminism is in many ways antithetical to the notion of an open society in which all members are valued in accordance with their distinct identities. Postfeminist culture's centralization of an affluent elite certainly entails an emphatic individualism, but this formulation tends to confuse self-interest with individuality and elevates consumption as a strategy for healing those dissatisfactions that might alternatively be understood in terms of social ills and discontents. (Tasker & Negra 2)

Gill relates the notion of individualism with female identity, and defines it as an intellectual and cognitive entity, exhibiting a social position instead of an erotically empowered and sexualized one.

Rosalind Gill's concept of women being sexualized and subjectified while calling it individualism; freedom of choice and woman empowerment will be applied to the female characters selected for the research. Elizabeth Gilbert's *City of Girls*, 2019 and Lauren Weisberger's *Chasing Harry Winston*, 2008 will be analyzed under the lens of postfeminism through explanation from the postfeminist themes introduced by Gill. The analysis of both novels will show how women are subjected to sexualized representations on the basis of gender. Gill highlights the ambiguous nature of these postfeminist discourses as they consist an amalgamation of both feminist and anti-feminist ideas through which they get instilled into the minds of the male and female audience. The normalization of such notions in chick lit discourses has made them acceptable and women have set them as goals that they need to achieve in order to feel worthy and become successful. The "possession of a sexy body" and consumer culture has become a standard for having it all than it being opposed and resisted (Gill, "Postfeminist Media Culture" 149).

Through application of textual analysis, the research critically analyzes both novels and the different aspects in which female gender is seen with extreme emphasis on their body and beauty. The erotic representation of women and their femininity is justified under a neoliberal perspective in which individualism is a significant aspect. Gill criticizes this by arguing that individualism and choice is only achieved and depicted through sexual portrayal of women. When this embracement of sexuality is opposed by feminist theorists like Angela McRobbie, Simone de Beauvoir, Yvonne Tasker, Diane Negra, and Rosalind Gill, they are deemed to only be anti-feminist. Through postfeminist sensibility, the research focuses upon the idea of individualism, empowerment and choice, representation of femininity as a bodily

property on the basis of which she is given agency and made into a sexualized, dominant subject. Gill defines subjectification and explains how women are shown as active, desiring subjects, appearing to be central characters of society. All these themes constitute a postfeminist sensibility and create a postfeminist framework. Unlike Gill's exploration and analysis of postfeminist media culture, the thesis analyses chick lit and gives a different and deep insight of the postfeminist woman of chick lit.

The identities of female characters are being constructed upon ideals of erotic beauty which is portrayed as a norm and such school of thought embeds more deeply into the patriarchal system. Gill calls this the "sexualization of culture", defined as "raunch culture" by the author Ariel Levy, who has thoroughly discussed the "sexualization of culture" in her book *Mainstreaming Sex: The Sexualization of Western Culture, 2009*; also analyzed by Rosalind Gill under Postfeminist Sensibility. The "raunch culture" is defined as "a culture that sexualizes women and inspires them to objectify themselves and others" (Levy). She writes in her book *Female Chauvinist Pigs: Women and the Rise of Raunch Culture, 2005*,

Pamela Anderson's autobiographical novel, *Star*, which came with a nude pinup of the author, stayed on the New York Times best-seller list for two weeks in the summer of 2004. Back when hooker-turned-writer Tracy Quan's 'Diary of a Manhattan Call Girl' came out in 2001, you could find it prominently displayed at Barnes & Noble, right next to Harry Potter... these are our role models, this is high fashion and low culture, this is athletics and politics, this is television and publishing, and—good news! —being a part of it makes you a strong, powerful woman. Because we have determined that all empowered women must be overtly and publicly sexual, and because the only sign of sexuality we seem to be able to recognize is a direct allusion to red-light entertainment, we have laced the sleazy energy and aesthetic of a topless club, or a Penthouse shoot throughout our entire culture. (Levy 24-25)

The notion of sexualisation (of culture), subjectification, female identity and femininity, and individualism have been explored upon which the characters are built and shown to be leading a meaningful, free, and empowering life.

CHAPTER 4

SEXUALISED FEMALE REPRESENTATION IN *CITY OF GIRLS AND CHASING HARRY WINSTON*

In this chapter, Rosalind Gill's theoretical concept of Postfeminist Sensibility, and her themes of subjectification; individualism, choice and empowerment; sexualisation of culture; femininity as a bodily property; are used to analyze the female characters in the two novels: Elizabeth Gilbert's *City of Girls* and Lauren Weisberger's *Chasing Harry Winston*. The themes discussed by Gill are incorporated to study them with respect to the representation of postfeminist characters in both books. After providing with a brief summary of both the books, I start with my analysis and discuss how female body is presented as her source of identity and power. After the analysis of this relationship, the sexualisation of culture and the manner in which sexualisation of the female gender takes place is studied in detail. Through the analysis of sexualisation of culture, the phenomenon of subjectification and the specific shift that postfeminism brings, is examined. The subjectification of female characters then develops their individualism along with how these female subjects exercise the notion of choice in order to establish their empowered identity.

4.1. Summary – *City of Girls and Chasing Harry Winston*

Gilbert starts her novel with the main character, Vivian, narrating her story in a letter to her beloved's daughter Angela who asks Vivian how she knows Angela's father. The now old-aged Vivian answers Angela by narrating her story back from when she was 19-years-old. Gilbert takes her readers along Vivian's journey which describes how she transforms into a sexually liberated and a subjective woman who is in control of her life and relationships.

The book starts with Vivian's journey to her Aunt Peg's theater after she fails college, and her parents decide to send her to her aunt. Aunt Peg lives at the floor built above her theater called *The Lily*. At the theater, Aunt Peg has some showgirls, a writer, a musician, and an old friend of her living in her apartment above the theater house as well. Vivian befriends the showgirls Celia, Gladys, and Jennie. However,

Celia becomes her closest friend and her source of inspiration. Celia Ray is an extremely gorgeous and sexually attractive girl. Vivian is awestruck by Celia's body and her beauty. She is fazed by the looks of her and allows her to stay in her room that is given to Vivian by Aunt Peg. When the girls at the theater learn that Vivian is still a virgin, they all advise her to lose her virginity. Furthermore, the girls advise Vivian to not lose it to someone she likes. Therefore, the girls choose Dr. Kellogg, a married old-aged doctor from an upper class family. Dr. Kellogg sleeps with several showgirls on weekends when his wife leaves to see her mother. The showgirls explain to Vivian that they sleep with him to earn extra cash in order to enjoy expensive clothes and food. Gilbert explains this exchange to be simply a decent setting for girls to earn some extra pocket money. After Celia and Vivian develop a bond together, Vivian joins her in her late night adventures on which she goes without leaving a single day to rest. These adventures mainly include dressing in the most minimalist of dresses, getting drunk and sleeping with rich men. While Vivian is living at *The Lily*, her aunt organizes a huge theater play with mainly the help of her ex-husband Billy. Billy writes the play, brings in money for it, motivates everyone on set and backstage, and brings the most profit from it. Billy is shown as a flirtatious man who is handsome and attracts every woman towards him. He is also the one who saves the day when Peg's huge theater play hit is close to failure. During all this time, Vivian mistakenly sleeps with a famous actress's husband. She feels humiliated after this, as the actress had become her friend, so she decides to go back to her home. In the later years, she meets Angela's father with whom she develops a solely emotional relationship, in which there is nothing physical. The whole book displays Vivian's sex fueled adventures through which she describes herself to be a free and empowered self-sufficient woman. She decides that there is no need to apologize for her carnal needs. Angela's father comes at the end of the book, regardless of it being presented as the main agenda for Vivian in writing the letter to Angela to share how she knew her father. Vivian describes her sexual fantasies and her desire to seek pleasure and sex in all the chapters of the book. Whereas the main reason for writing her story and the letter only comes at the very end of the book. Vivian narrates how she changes into a woman who likes exclusively physical relationships and is unable to marry anyone. The physical nature of her relationships gives her a sense of freedom, independence, unique individuality and the energy to live, that she values the most about herself and cannot ever let go of.

The second novel being taken is Lauren Weisberger's *Chasing Harry Winston*. Weisberger starts her book with three friends: Adriana, Emmy and Leigh. All of them are close to the age of thirty, with two of them making a pact to change their lives in the course of one year. After Emmy's boyfriend leaves her, she swears to sleep with a different man in each continent in order to find her lost self and to become a better version of herself. Adriana makes a pact to stop sleeping with every rich and attractive man and decides to marry someone eligible. However, by the end of the book, she concludes that she cannot marry or stay exclusive with anyone; it is a waste of her body and beauty. Emmy, after getting to sleep with several men, finds someone who likes her due to her sexual transformative self which she acquires only after she experiences her sex fueled adventures. Their third friend Leigh is close to marrying her fiancée when she mistakenly sleeps with the author she is working with for whom she develops feelings. Weisberger shows all three of her characters to either be sexually attractive or acquiring such a version of themselves. All three characters are mainly only shown to be talking about men, sexuality, clothing, and evaluation of themselves on such basis.

4.2. Source of Identity and Power in Chick Lit

Women's bodies are constantly being evaluated, with their worth depending on their appearance. The female body and her femininity are both interlinked, by the femininity being solely defined as a woman's body, through which her entire identity is being dissected. Women's intellectual capability and psychological intricacies are fully exempted, and their bodies are shown to be playing the role of defining them, through which they are bestowed with agency and power. Rosalind Gill writes:

... it is possession of a 'sexy body' that is presented as women's key (if not sole) source of identity. The body is presented simultaneously as women's source of power and as always already unruly and requiring constant monitoring, surveillance, discipline and remodeling (and consumer spending) in order to conform to ever narrower judgments of female attractiveness. ("Postfeminist Media Culture" 149)

Elizabeth Gilbert and Lauren Weisberger, both start their novels talking about how their protagonists aspire to look sexy and beautiful, admire those who have an alluring appearance with the perfect attire. They describe their characters acquiring

such characteristics and transforming themselves and their bodies to be sexually appealing, making them gain a position above others.

“Looking back on it now, I cannot fully recall what I’d been doing with my time during those many hours that I ought to have spent in class, but - knowing me - I suppose I was terribly preoccupied with my appearance” (Gilbert 11). Gilbert starts her novel with the main character, Vivian, narrating her story in a letter to her beloved’s daughter Angela, who asks Vivian how she knew Angela’s father. Vivian describes herself as a person who barely ever studied her whole life due to being obsessed with her looks and appearance. The notion of identity that is defined here is solely through the sexual appeal and the inclination towards physicality of her character. The important aspect worth mentioning here is that even after becoming of old age, the main character deems it fit to have one’s self-defining trait to be their sexuality and appearance. Vivian does not hold ownership of her own self, and hence the patriarchal standards retain her image of herself.

And there were girls at Vassar who were bold academic explorers, destined to become doctors and lawyers long before many women did that sort of thing. I should have been interested in them, but I wasn’t. (I couldn’t tell any of them apart, for one thing. They all wore the same shapeless wool skirts that looked as though they’d been constructed out of old sweaters, and that just made my spirits low). (Gilbert 11)

While sharing Vivian’s early days of college, girls’ identity is defined through what they wear and how ‘non sexy’ or mediocre Vivian finds their appearance. The sole reason that Vivian gives for why some of the girls at her college do not interest her regardless of their high achievements is because they wear “shapeless woolen skirts” which made Vivian feel demotivated, (Gilbert 11). Similarly, Weisberger shows one of her main character Adriana in a setting in which everyone is gawking at her and her gorgeous body, she being well aware of it bends and reveals it more while the writer also admires her attire. The authority that women are shown to seemingly have over their bodies has resulted in not only giving themselves away to be objectified (while believing themselves to be independent and desiring), but it has also led them to scrutinize other women and quite unashamedly, call it ‘choice’ or being ‘groomed’. While attempting at portraying the woman in the position of power, the chick lit authors’ characters are introduced only through their physical figure.

“There was one more person living at the Lily when I moved in, and I’ve saved her for last, because she was the most important to me. That person was Celia—the showgirl, my goddess” (Gilbert 55). Gilbert picks Celia Ray to be the person who catches Vivian’s attention right away and draws Vivian towards herself. Vivian gets enthused by Celia who is described as an extremely sensual girl due to the voluptuous body that she possesses, unlike all other girls that work at the theater. She has the most perfect feminine body. Celia is out every night because she chooses to celebrate and enjoy her youth and sexuality, by being sexually involved with new men each night. There are several instances in which Vivian feels Celia Ray’s company and indulgence with her to be a privilege. She feels honored that Celia cherry-picks her to become her friend. This degree of importance given to Celia is simply due to the sensual body and the casual lifestyle that she leads, always willing to make use of her body.

“Do you realize how many girls would change places with you in a heartbeat? To spend just a single night in that body of yours? Hell, just this morning I had two socialites-in-training jabbering away about how utterly fab your life is.” “Really?” She pouted at herself in the mirror but he could detect a hint of pleasure” (Weisberger 23). Similar to Gilbert, Weisberger shows the same kind of appraisal for body when she states how anyone would want to have a body like Adriana. Gill defines such representation to be “femininity as a bodily property” (149), making body to be the core identity and defining characteristic of being feminine and being a woman. Rosalind Gill’s fellow British cultural theorist Angela McRobbie also talks about the lens under which only the body is examined and describes that through this showcasing, a woman’s body has come to be shown as a “window into her interior life” (Gill, “Postfeminist Media Culture” 151). A figure that is “curvaceous, toned, and lustrous” (Gill, “Postfeminist Media Culture” 151) is representative of a woman’s worth and success in the postfeminist culture and chick lit (McRobbie).

She changed her name to Celia Ray, moved in with a few other dancers, and began her career—which consisted of putting forth her gorgeousness into the world, for the sake of personal advancement. She started working as a taxi dancer at the Honeymoon Lane Danceland on Seventh Avenue, where she let men grope her, perspire on her, and cry with loneliness in her arms for fifty dollars a week, plus “presents” on the side (Gilbert 62).

In introduction to Celia Ray's past life, she puts her body on display in order to become popular and a more successful dancer. To show a woman going through the process of achieving success, it is definite that her body and beauty be the main components in making that happen. This entails that any opportunity that comes a woman's way is through the means of their feminine body. Such representation has made only those women to be given value who acquire an erogenous figure and a lifestyle that entails they are doing what they desire. While women are performing and trying to feel and become worthwhile and portray success, men are portrayed as only "pleasure seeking", exempt from any kind of scrutiny and denunciation (Gill, "Postfeminist Media Culture" 151). The discourses that are divided in such a way are termed as "sexualised discourses" (Gill, "Postfeminist Media Culture" 151), through which sexualisation is explained further in this chapter.

"She tried for the Miss New York beauty pageant when she was sixteen, but lost to a girl who played the vibraphone onstage in a bathing suit... And she'd been an artist's model—selling her naked body for hours at a time to art schools and painters" (Gilbert 62 63). Such depictions of women which include their achievements in life are being related to how well they make use of their bodies, which is fundamental to the structure of chick lit discourse and in understanding how female identity is created. These female representations are also essential in unfolding of the postfeminist sexual model by which women have seemingly gained the position of power. Gill criticizes this by arguing that the hierarchical structures brought forth by neoliberalism gain more validity and are more deeply embedded through such female models created by postfeminist chick lit discourses.

"Her mind skipped straight to fame and riches, with no apparent map for how to get there—other than to keep looking like *this*, and to assume that the world would eventually reward her for it. It wasn't much of a plan—although, to be fair, it was more of a plan than I had for my own life" (Gilbert 64). With Celia Ray, the plan to her attainment of success, which is becoming rich and famous, is owing to looking sexual, feminine, and erotic. Celia only has to use her femininity, which is defined as a "bodily property" (Gill, "Postfeminist Media Culture" 150), to climb higher and achieve success. This constant attention given to the construction of a sexy body seems to have become a requirement for authors of chick lit. Maintenance of such an appearance and figure are associated with success and fame through which chick lit or

magazine and media advertisements are sold to the female audience (Gill, “Postfeminist Media Culture” 149). With the creation of chick lit discourses, women have come to define their identity and the identity of others only through their body for them to denote success.

“We are not getting any younger, and I think we can all acknowledge that there are only a limited number of rich, handsome, successful men between the ages of thirty and forty. If we don’t claim ours now”—she cupped both hands around her firm breasts and pushed them upward— “then we may as well forget it.”” (Weisberger 65). While Adriana calls her friends to get hitched with a rich and handsome man, she is mainly only defining her and her friends’ identities with their bodies. She even presumes that men would only see a woman’s body (one that must be uptight, curvaceous, and sensual) to deem them being worthy of men and acceptable only because they possess a sensual feminine body. Lauren Weisberger shows in the similar manner, an eroticized body as a woman’s source of power and identification. With this characterization, Weisberger’s main female characters are also submitted and limited to ambitions like claiming a man and looking sexy and young. On the other hand, Gilbert shows her protagonist Vivian to not wanting to be confined in a relationship, but Vivian is shown to be using her body and sleeping with every other man. Through this characterization, Vivian seems to have all the power as she can get any man and fulfil all her desires, solely by means of her body.

Emmy sighed. “I know I shouldn’t hate you for having a perfect body, but I do. I really, really do.” “Darling, these, too, can be yours”—Adriana cupped her breasts and pushed them up, causing her nightie to slide up over her hips to reveal a complete Brazilian wax— “for ten grand and a few hours under Dr. Kramer’s magical hands.” She glanced down and gave them each another squeeze. “I’m so glad I had them redone when they legalized silicone. It’s so much more natural, don’t you think?” Emmy had admired—oh, hell, she’d worshipped—Adriana’s implants since the moment she returned with them after Christmas break sophomore year (Weisberger 120).

Through this passage, the way in which femininity is showcased and female identity is constructed can be analysed. The relation between the creation of a new self with the use of one’s body is marked as a significant element of Postfeminist Sensibility. Gill defines the neoliberal woman as the one who creates a new version of

herself to fit in a society. This version of femininity is one whose main connection is with her carnal self, doing what it desires. Adriana is an empowered woman, who can get any man and is valued by all her friends. She is considered a goddess who possesses the perfect feminine body which is the single feature that characterizes her as esteemed and prized. However, this female identification is made possible by the author when Adriana is shown to be conforming to ideals of beauty and female attractiveness through consumer spending. The idea of consumerism can be identified to be playing a major role in constructing the postfeminist woman, other than the apparent *need* to have a perfect body. Adriana shares with Emmy the pathway to acquiring a perfectly new and valued version of herself to be through breast implants, a Brazilian waxed body, for them to be evolving into a complete first-hand figure that any man would want them for.

“You may flit around the Make-A-Wish benefit like an angel, but at core you’re a dirty slut, and I love you for that” (Weisberger 24). The type of body Adriana is shown to be possessing is compared with her lifestyle as well. She is always shown to be sexually active, guiding her friends with how they can land a guy, and sleeping with several men herself. Weisberger makes it fundamental for her main characters to have complete responsibility of their appearance and their lives that are necessary to be sexually active. It is necessary for them to look sensual and appealing to men, to be leading a life that should be filled with sexual adventures. “There’s only one logical way to proceed: I am going to have sex with random men. All sorts and sizes and colors of random men. All kinds of sex, for that matter” (Weisberger 42-43) Emmy is the character introduced in *Chasing Harry Winston, 2008* who loses her five years’ boyfriend even though she was ‘doing all that he liked in bed’, yet he leaves her. She then makes a pact with her friends that she is going to sleep with all the random men who she can attract and that is deemed as the road to finding fulfilment. This depiction of Emmy’s character not only brings forth the idea that women do as they desire, and they seemingly have all the power, but it also instigates Emmy’s identity as the one who is youthful, pleasure seeking, and a sensual woman. Hence, the female identity is presented by only defining how sexually dynamic she is and how far she can go towards in search of (receiving or giving) pleasure from the masculine gender with the use of her physicality. The distinct form of identity that she apparently seems to have, is being justified by making men the object of her new life plan. She is shown

to be deciding how she can get any man *only* by means of her body. Weisberger provides getting into sexual intercourse with random men and using a woman's body to achieve fulfilment as the only logical plan for Emmy's life after she goes through a heartbreak. Gill analyzes the notion of femininity merely as a "bodily property" and argues that femininity is an intellectual, cognitive and a social property than simply biological or carnal. The body is shown to be the source in constructing a woman's identity. Famous Social Psychologist Gerard Hofstede defines masculinity in comparison to femininity in his book *Culture's Consequences, 2001*, as, "Masculinity stands for a society in which social gender roles are clearly distinct: Men are supposed to be assertive, tough, and focused on material success; women are supposed to be more modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life" (Hofstede 297). Hence, femininity being termed as caring and nurturing, regardless of being controversial, differs from what it has come to be defined through postfeminism. A woman who owns a sexy body is defined to be feminine and possessing such characteristic validates her as an attractive powerful woman. This validation seemingly gives her an esteemed position in society. Gill further explores these choices, and the ways female identity is marked as mainly carnal and physical.

Real, fake, who really cared when they were that goddamn perfect?... When faced with breasts like Adriana's, Emmy envisioned drawers full of sexy, lacy bras; halter dresses that could be filled out; a world rich with unpadded bikini tops; a total inability to shop in the children's section because her chest would never fit in a little girl's shirt. She dreamed of never hearing the "more than a handful" adage ever again, and wearing strapless dresses without stuffing them first, and having a man stare at her cleavage instead of her eyes, just once. (Weisberger 120-121)

Before going on a sex spree, Emmy is shown as a character who is a pushover and submissive. She lacks in physical appearance due to which her confidence is shown to be shaking and she can be made easily anxious. Emmy's success also depends upon how she behaves, dresses, and views solely the idea of sex. Weisberger describes at several instances, how Emmy cannot dress in a sensual manner, how she has been with only two men and how she views being with several men to be not right. While referencing to Helen Fielding's chick lit novel *Bridget Jones' Diary, 1996*, Weisberger compares Emmy to Bridget Jones along with highlighting the fact that although she is not chubby but skinny, it still is not attractive, and stresses greatly

upon what an innocent and a pathetic life she is living. Her two friends Adriana and Leigh provide her with the solution to change her life; and that is to sleep with more men and make use of her body more, that will make her *align* her life and *accomplish* more. Emmy first hesitates, and soon enough makes a pact with them that she is going to turn her sad life around, and make her friends proud with her *whoredom*. She is shown wondering many times throughout the book about how gorgeous her friend's body is and how lucky she would have been if she could get such a figure. Weisberger makes Adriana's alluring figure to be the center of focus for most part of the book along with the admiration and approval of one's personality that comes with it. Emmy not only admires it, but is shown to be making her friend proud by making use of her body, taking pleasure in it, and suddenly earning the recognition that she is shown to be initially lacking. Such transformations from a clumsy and inept woman into a powerful and accomplished one take place almost always with the main female characters of the chick lit genre. Popular novels like *Bridget Jones' Diary*, 1996; *The Devil Wears Prada*, 2003; *Sex and the City*, 1997; *Eat, Pray, Love*, 2006; all carry the theme of women going through the transformation from being a submissive, unaccomplished, and unattractive to being the opposite. All of this is achieved over acquiring dressing sense and becoming physically alluring and desirable. Gill talks about such combative and vicious assessment of women's bodies and appearance, how they dress and walk, along with different derogatory remarks. She highlights how such evaluations create a divide among women, believing those who are carnal and bold to be superior from those who are not. However, several more prejudiced distinctions have also been made and criticized in the past.

While women are judged on the basis of their appearance, disregarding their internal thought patterns, sensitivities, and purposes other than looking sensual or appealing to men, the masculine gender is exempt from any such evaluations. In comparison to women, men are portrayed as intricate, thoughtful, and intellectual beings; no amount of criticism or degradation is even remotely targeted at any man. Only the feminine gender is made responsible to transform its body, believing themselves to be in control and exercising free will. The only issues that the chick lit authors present their characters with are those of molding their bodies, maintaining it and being always up for the next sexual exploit or the next day of choosing what to

wear (that must result in the voluptuous display of their body) in order to deem them fruitful, desirable, and deserving (of rich, handsome men).

The subject came up that afternoon because the girls were talking about sex—which was the only thing they *ever* talked about, when they weren't talking about clothing, money, where to eat, how to become a movie star, how to marry a movie star, or whether they should have their wisdom teeth removed (as they claimed Marlene Dietrich had done, in order to create more dramatic cheekbones). (Gilbert 66)

In maintaining the female identity to be carnal and physical, the chick lit authors associate them majorly with topics and conversations that involve only *sex talk*. The topics of interest that women are presented with do not show their intellectual capacity. By showing the importance to have knowledge of everything related to sex and portraying women who only ever talk about ways to become sexier and gain fame by following the beauty standards. Another very important aspect that must be highlighted through this passage from the book is that every female character is shown to have free will and some distinct identity, but they are still relying on men to get fame or comfort. Every woman is shown to be planning to get a sexier looking body so she can achieve her goals, which also revolve around consumer spending and conforming to patriarchal standards, one way or another. The passage points towards consumer culture, whose influence has molded women's perception of themselves and other women. They are shown to be evaluating themselves and other women while conforming to beauty standards through consumer spending. Hence, women's professed authority over themselves gets dismantled as they conform to the beauty standards that define a woman attractive through consumer spending. In this way, the maintenance of hierarchical setups prevails and get even more embedded into the system, while the apparent freedom gets women to believe themselves to be no longer oppressed or submitted to male hegemony.

I was only sorry that I didn't have something more exciting to report. "I don't have a boyfriend, no," I said. Gladys seemed alarmed... "Not even once, you haven't gone the limit?" Gladys asked me, wide-eyed in disbelief. "Do you go to church?" Jennie asked, as if that could be the only possible explanation for my still being a virgin at age nineteen. "Are you saving it?" "No! I'm not saving it. I just haven't had the chance." They all seemed concerned now. They were all looking at me as if I'd just said that I'd never learned how to cross a street by myself. (Gilbert 66-67)

The book's main character, Vivian, is shown to be a virgin, not having gone through any experiences with men. When she comes to New York and meets the city girls, they learn about her inexperience, and she is met with extreme astonishment. All the girls are shaken by the fact that Vivian is still a virgin. Following this, Vivian shares her mild sexual adventures. Gilbert vividly describes how in a school dance she once lets a boy *handle* her breasts and she does not stop him because she did not want to be *rude*. In another story, Vivian shares how once an older man in a bar made her feel his erected body and she ached to feel more. While she also shares the time a male doctor examined her when she had not yet gotten her menstrual cycle started; however, it was not a stimulating experience for her. All such exploits which are described as close to nothing present a sensual picture of Vivian's journey. The girls at theatre push Vivian to lose her virginity while she herself also believes how she has wasted all the years doing nothing of value. "'Do you want to stay a virgin, Vivvie?'" she asked, ... And while she might as well have been asking, "Do you want to stay an ignorant child, seen as pitiable by this gathering of mature and worldly women?" the intention behind the question was sweet" (Gilbert 70). The novel shows that having multiple sexual relationships and using one's body is a necessity, while the lack of it is not only something to be ashamed of, but it also judges the inexperienced person to be inferior to others. Vivian is not only looked down upon, but she is also shown to be agreeing with the judgements and being a malleable personality in the face of all such remarks. This flexibility in Vivian's nature is representative of women's identity being majorly defined by their body and their sexual inclinations. The female subject is supposed to turn into a silent object when its identity is being described and molded by others. Hence, the authority of women over themselves is taken through conformation to a neoliberal identity.

In Gill's comparison of a postfeminist identity with a neoliberal identity, elements of a postfeminist sensibility highly resemble those that constitute a neoliberal identity. The way in which a woman's body is monitored and deemed pitiable without its use in all the sexual means presented and without its association with a man, is similar to neoliberal definition of womanhood. Gill talks about the ideals and gendered expectations that a neoliberal identity creates for women through which they can feel self-reliant, having authority in their hands. The source of a neoliberal identity is similar to a postfeminist female identity in which a woman needs

to be self-reliant and gain power and independence by following the ideals and the gendered expectations attached to their identity of womanhood. Women's need to gain power and authority is not presented via their intellect or any other abilities, but via their body and their ability to use it well. Thus, the similarity between a neoliberal and a postfeminist identity contributes to embedding the dominant hierarchical system, unknowingly granting more power to men. The vital most part in embedding these hierarchical relationships is the divide that strengthens its roots among women. The female subject who is able to gain apparent authority and is independent fulfills the definition of neoliberal femininity while those who cannot/ do not gain authority do not fulfill their role of being feminine and of womanhood; and hence are considered to be weak and invaluable; than powerful and esteemed. Thus, gender disparity prevails due to the legitimization and acceptance of these hierarchical relationships and femininity and female identity seen as a "bodily property" (Gill, "Postfeminist Media Culture" 149).

The girls advise Vivian not to lose her virginity to a guy she might like as guys do not like to take "responsibility" (Gilbert 57). Gill describes in *Postfeminist Sensibility* the mannerism by which women are made responsible for maintaining only their bodies along with using it wisely, which will be described in this research through further examples. Gill identifies the elements of self-surveillance, self-discipline, and self-monitoring. Women's bodies are the only ones that need to be disciplined and expended correctly, whereas men are spared of all such responsibility and discipline. This marks a clear distinction in the representations of men and women, and specifically the way femininity is presented and defined. The boundaries being set for the feminine gender to be representative of only sensuality and its submission to male desire, can be vividly observed in Gilbert's and Weisberger's portrayal of female characters. These boundaries are set in the form of women's inclination towards only evolving themselves to display an erogenous self. Disciplining of the body and achieving a feminine self, both are deemed to be the driving purposes for women to achieve a sexually appealing body. Their disposition is relentless towards attaining a life that is sexually attractive, regardless of how contradicted it might become for them to mold into it. Gilbert and Weisberger show their characters Vivian and Emmy to be acquiring an identity that is solely reflective of their sexuality. Such representation of femininity then comes to define identity only

in a sexual context, in which a woman's character invites the unapologetic and bizarre evaluation of her body.

Gladys warns Vivian that being intimate with some guy she likes, not knowing what she is doing and "blubbering like an idiot" (Gilbert 57) is downright insulting. Such imagery and characterization show that the female gender needs to be perfect and disciplined, sexy, and desirable, instead of being herself and being human. When Gladys and other girls lecture Vivian about how she should be and how she should behave with a man, Vivian questions her reality and all that she believed to be true from her past. Gilbert shows Vivian to be quickly changing all her beliefs and getting molded to a new mindset as she comes across new information. She views the girls to be admirable because they knew things. The author shows that having only sexual knowledge makes one worthy of admiration and it is a quality that affirms your femininity, and thus your authority and power over yourself and others. Hence; firstly, women are shown to have power over themselves and over men because they have such knowledge and are inclined towards sex, and secondly; they are considered above those women who do not or cannot fall under their expertise. Gill highlights this divide among women with its effects on feminist goals that postfeminism seems to have evolved from. Such a divide amongst women does now empower them, nor does it land authority to them. Rather, the patriarchy deepens its roots and gets normalized as men and women both relegate and marginalize the feminine gender. "“Not even by accident,” I said, wondering how it was that a person could ever have sex by accident. (Don't worry, Angela—I know now. Accidental sex is the easiest thing to do, once you get in the habit of it. I've had plenty of accidental sex in my life since then, believe me, but at that moment I was not yet so cosmopolitan.)” (Gilbert 67). The female gender's intellect and diversity is demonstrated by how casual and eager they should be in performing sexual activities and indulging themselves in sexual encounters. Women who are always "up for it" (Gill, "Postfeminist Media Culture" 151) are marked as wanted and attractive by other women and men, and as a result, this is what comes to identify their distinctiveness and seemingly gives them authority over themselves and the masculine gender. Vivian's habit of finding herself having committed accidental sex defines her and other women's diverse nature and the habits they are accustomed of. Hence, sex and body are like a *window* through which a woman's whole life is represented.

“Adriana stared at him in disbelief. It was confirmed: He was talking directly to Emmy. Unbelievable! Could this delicious little treat actually prefer Emmy to her?... Adriana focused on keeping the tears at bay” (Weisberger 130). Adriana is the character who Weisberger portrays having an extremely sensual body and a lifestyle that solely involves sleeping with several men. Adriana does not work anywhere, and her activities revolve around only going to the saloon to have herself beautified, buying expensive laundry, and sleeping with rich handsome men. Due to her sexy body, and her mother’s history in modelling career, she gains spotlight and is invited at NGO’s related events and to be made ambassador of different brands, all due to her awfully voluptuous body and her mother’s career. On the other hand, Emmy lives in an average apartment whose rent she can hardly pay, and she is portrayed as someone with a petite body and almost no breasts (that Weisberger mentions quite a lot in the course of whole book). In the specific instance taken from the passage where all three friends are lying on a beach and a nearby guy approaches Emmy to ask her out. Adriana is extremely shocked at him for talking to Emmy than her and giving her friend preference over her, which is never the case. Such characterization puts a woman like Adriana in the position of power and others below and powerless to her, unworthy of admiration or praise. Even while Weisberger gives authority to Emmy regardless of her looks, she clearly defines how rare and preposterous it is that a woman with Emmy’s body can gain any attention at all. Along with this, Emmy is shown to also start receiving men’s attention due to the transformation that she undergoes. After she makes a pact to start sleeping with more men, Weisberger shows her to have become more appealing and sexier.

Gill highlights the stark naked depiction of women in chick lit that makes them worthy of praise and deems them to be perfect in all aspects of life. Therefore, solely the revealing and flaunting of one’s body makes them gain respect, admiration, and men’s attention. Hence, the sexy body is representative of not only power, but the characters’ identity is also dependent upon its acquisition. The postfeminist female characters are shown with agency and character on the basis of conforming to the postfeminist ideal of femininity and sexuality.

4.3. Sexualisation of Culture

Rosalind Gill coins the notion of sexualization while explaining postfeminist sensibility. She defines sexualisation as “extraordinary proliferation of discourses

about sex and sexuality” and the “frequent erotic presentation of girls” (Gill, “Postfeminist Media Culture” 150). She refers to the stark concentration on women’s body that has come to be the new normal as it defines her body as a ground for femininity, (Gill, “Postfeminist Media Culture” 148). This representation of women gives rise to the sexualization of culture. Gill further explains sexualization as the representation of women’s bodies in extremely erotic ways, along with the propagation of chick lit discourses and media forms which are only about sex and female sexuality. Gill argues that the contemporary culture is extensively sexualized and such sexualized narratives have become unnecessarily regular and common. Women and girls have come to be consistently shown in an erotic and pornographic manner, in all public domains. She mentions different TV shows, news programs, print media and chick lit discourses whose agenda is to get more ratings and viewership through such propagation of the feminine gender, sex, and sexual desire. Such representation is not only limited to women belonging to specific professions or race; women of all profession, whether they are a housewife, journalist, politician, or a fashion model. Every woman is graciously offered to be tabulated sexually.

I understand that there is a word for women who offer sexual favors to gentlemen in exchange for money... But none of the showgirls with whom I associated in New York City in 1940 described themselves in that manner—not even as they were actively taking money from gentlemen in exchange for sexual favors. They couldn’t possibly be prostitutes; they were *showgirls*... But the situation was simply this: showgirls did not earn a great deal of money, you see, and everyone has to get by in this world somehow (shoes are expensive!), and so these girls had developed a system of *alternative arrangements* for earning a bit of extra cash on the side. The Dr. Kelloggs of the world were part of that system. In other words, despite all evidence that sex was being exchanged for money (and sex was being exchanged for money, make no mistake about it) nobody here was engaging in *prostitution*. This was merely an *alternative arrangement* that suited everyone involved. (Gilbert 72)

Gilbert’s stance states that it is completely fine and simple for girls and women to have multiple sexual partners in exchange for money. Especially, when you are earning it as a side pocket so you can buy “expensive shoes”. From a broader analysis, women are shown to be only related to money and sex. The capacity of a woman to earn wealth, fame, to fulfil her ambitions and desires are all acquired

through the use of female sexuality and sex. Gill explains the way sexualization of discourses takes place and how it gets structurally displaced. She further explains how sex is presented only in an enthusiastic and unself-conscious manner. After sleeping with Dr. Kellogg, Vivian asks her friend Gladys if she ever feels any remorse over maintaining such a connection with Dr. Kellogg, and whether Vivian herself should feel bad about it. Gladys casually replies to her that being too concerned about morals and values is only a useless burden to limit oneself with. Girls' lifestyle is only being demonstrated in a purely carnal, pleasure-seeking manner. There is no measure or accountability of any action that the characters choose to make throughout both novels. The authors seem to have relieved their characters of any introspection regardless of presenting them as protagonists. Such characterization is carried out because a woman's femininity is measured through her physical figure and her sexuality; and her femininity is symbolic of her worth and her erotic goodness. Therefore, women are made responsible of only carrying and molding their sexuality and themselves as desirable for sex. This sexualization of the contemporary culture has a wide female audience through which it is distributed and disseminated further. Chick lit discourse has negligibly and subtly minimized the distinction between this eroticized pornographic nature of postfeminist genre and other genres. Gill terms it "porno chic" ("Postfeminist Media Culture" 151) and discards its themes that seem to be evolving into a better version of oneself, experiencing a romance-filled adventure or a passionate love story, or being a true postfeminist. Hence, she separates it from all other genres that it seems to work through.

"I made a hasty decision to strip down completely. I didn't want to look like a modest little dolt. I lay down on my back on that nauseating acetate bedspread, naked as can be" (Gilbert 77). Vivian decides through the girls' advice at the theatre to go to Dr. Kellogg, a married doctor to whom Vivian's friends offer up their bodies to and get paid for it. He is a man from the upper class and is described as very sophisticated in his manner. Vivian goes to his house on a weekend, with the girls seeing her off and wishing her luck. Gilbert shows it to be completely appropriate to sleep with a (married) man that you do not know justifiable due to the reason it is an adventurous, fun and a necessary thing to lose your virginity and to seek pleasure and desire. This idea of necessity includes a woman's abilities connected with her use of her sexuality. The above passage is representative of a woman's inability to strip, be sexual and

reveal her body to be a fool and stupid. A woman's shyness and modesty are believed to be a self-deprecating trait of hers, making her less and limited in her abilities to prove herself that she is capable of pleasing a man. The use of phrase that Vivian is fully naked and exposed gives a clear view of the sexualization of culture and the way it requires and determines for a woman to have the full capacity to reveal herself and make use of solely her sexuality. Rosalind Gill marks the connection of such erotic characterization of women with pornography. She says that women are shown to be conforming to pornographic representations of themselves in order to be seen as appealing to men by adhering to the models of their desire. The female gender is shown to be responsible for being desirable to men and playing with her sexuality at all times. In doing so, women must feel happy and in control, having all the power over men and leading a life they have accomplished through the precise use of their sexuality. Such regular dispersion of sexualized discourses also give rise to the "striptease culture" (McNair) and the new eroticized figures and symbols which get associated with femininity and thus an essential part of the female gender.

"Adriana lifted her dripping-wet torso slightly off the chair to straighten the cushion, but it was enough to cause an audible groan from a nearby sunbather" (Weisberger 128). In several instances from *Chasing Harry Winston, 2008*, Adriana's character is only always wearing something that reveals more of her bosom and curves, while men are vehemently pulled towards her. There is not a single instance in which the author has spared her body from being scrutinized and her identity being diminished by the male gaze. The intense emphasis on Adriana's figure and the response it keeps on getting from strangers, her friends, the fellows at the saloon, and her boyfriends is symbolic of the propagation of the sexualisation of culture through chick lit. Women are negligently and callously described and identified only through sexual contexts or through physical judgements made by men and other women. Despite Adriana's friends sitting with her in almost every setting, Weisberger notably shows her to be the center of men's and women's attention due to her sexual figure. This notable distinction demarcates a vantage point about valuing women who learn how to make use of their sexuality and live a sexually oriented life for them to be more successful and influential than those who do not. Due to this distinction that is being made through "sexualisation of discourses" (Gill, "Postfeminist Media Culture" 150), more young girls and women go after acquiring these created feminine

standards in order to achieve success, fame, or the desirable man. The acquisition of these feminine standards is accomplished through the proliferation of sexualised discourses (Gill, "Postfeminist Media Culture" 150), and the proliferation of consumer culture that has reached severe popularity through chick lit discourse.

"She climbed into a stretchy hot pink thong and a matching mesh bra that supported little and concealed nothing. Why not? she thought" (Weisberger 132). The proliferation of sexualised discourses has also given an upsurge to the consumer culture. The drastic effects of chick lit have seen a rise in consumer spending and a rise in more feminine brands who commercialize feminine identity and offer self-transformation through several transforming products and sexualized clothing. Weisberger's women protagonists are also under the severe effects of consumer spending and dependent on it. The above passage shows how the sexualized clothing that is strictly minimal and revealing in all aspects is the main feature used as a defining characteristic for a woman's appearance. The aspect of this specific clothing is what is shown to be making the women look desirable and worthy of men's attention. This specific appearance and to follow these feminine standards seem to have become a requirement for every woman. Rosalind Gill explains how women have become responsible for a sexual construction of themselves and to attract and please the male gender by performing and dressing sexually.

... it was impossible to tell what was happening under that babydoll dress. How she loathed babydoll dresses! Every woman on earth, herself included, looked either morbidly obese or eight months pregnant in babydoll dresses, and yet they were all the rage. Adriana suspected Mackenzie might even be hiding a pretty decent rack under that muumuu...a crime if there ever was one. (Weisberger 212)

The sexualisation of culture propagates the requirement that women need to construct themselves sexually and be desirable for sex in order for them to be valued, brings a major divide and a distinct structure of the way power dynamic operates through that. Women who have the ability to acquire an enhanced sexuality (through consumer spending) and appear desirable, either through surgeries or working out; to dress in a sexually attractive way; and to live a specific lifestyle that is inclined towards sex; are valued more than those who cannot follow that. Women who cannot follow these feminine standards are considered average and insignificant members of the society. This creates and embeds the power relations among women and positions

those who can do more consumer spending and transform themselves hold more worth and power over those who cannot. Gill highlights the insensitive judgements being made by women for those who are unable to build themselves to be sexually attractive to men and dress in an erotic manner. Due to the apparent authority that is being given to a sexualized female and similar kinds of representations of the feminine gender, women who cannot gain that are blatantly and unapologetically excluded. Gill talks about the divide that is created through this among women and how it effects the causes that women have been fighting against through feminist movements. She explains the damage being done to not only the feminine gender, but to also homosexuals and their rights; because such a construction that is solely of femininity and of women, excludes everyone else to be ineligible and worthless. Through *Postfeminist Sensibility*, Gill connects these elements to neoliberalism which projects a similar idea of everyone being solely responsible for their betterment through a seemingly magical transformation and through hard work. The responsibility that a social system holds and the effects it has on an individual's life are completely discarded. The construction of femininity and how it is defined, followed through consumer culture, and propagated is consciously ignored.

Gill talks about the feminist goals and the means through which postfeminism portrays them to have been achieved. Women seem to have gained all the freedom and authority over men and the male gender deepens its roots in the patriarchal neoliberal system. Weisberger perpetuates this divide and the sexualisation of women in the form of her eroticized characters. In the above mentioned quote, Adriana speculates a fellow woman Mackenzie's appearance at a dinner party. Mackenzie is wearing a babydoll dress, which is a loose dress that does not put emphasis on a woman's figure and her curves, making her look categorically boring. This observation being made on the basis of an unsensual appearance is not only an insult but also separates Mackenzie from being desirable or of any value. The only idea that can grant her any acknowledgement is that she *could* be hiding a sexy figure beneath, which Adriana believes would be a crime that she could be committing. Mackenzie's breasts are the source of acknowledgement for her, and the lack of them to be an insult. This is the introduction given by Weisberger of another woman. Another important aspect to notice here is the insult being made by Adriana. A woman who does not have such an enhanced sexuality and figure is considered both dumb and

invaluable, or an obese or a pregnant woman; both to be far from anything desirable and appealing. In comparison to that, there is little to no evaluation of men's sexuality or their appearance. Gill highlights this aspect to be significant while describing sexualisation. The imbalanced and biased proliferation of these discourses of sex makes men to be the intellectual and calm thinkers who handle the economic system and the hierarchical setups while women live in a psychological power packed bubble in which they have all the authority and right to evaluate another woman on the basis of her appearance.

Throughout the Lauren Weisberger's novel, there are several instances in which her female characters are only discussing about their carnal desires, the fabric or colour of their underpants, how revealing a piece of a dress or lingerie is, or their body parts. After Gill brings forth the element of an imbalanced proliferation of discourses of sex, and criticizes the ways in which a woman's identity has gotten limited to only these sexualized representations; she gives a detailed analysis of the ways in which men are presented. The case of excessive evaluation of a woman's body done by other women is entirely opposite when it comes to men.

In chick lit, a man is portrayed as either a hedonist who is only after a woman's perfect body or pleasure, whose wish should be granted to him; or he is portrayed as a sensitive, rational yet profound being who takes pride in himself and whose pride needs to be catered to (Tincknell et al & Gill 8). McRobbie refers to this as connected to the "new femininity" in which casual sex and physical attraction builds the narrative of defining gender roles. Through this characterization of women's sexuality, they are influenced towards seeking multiple sexual partners instead of being in a committed relationship (McRobbie 1997). Gill refers through McRobbie, the delineation of man, as either a hedonist or a rational being whose wants need to be accommodated to ("Postfeminist Media Culture" 151) (Tincknell). Adriana in *Chasing Harry Winston, 2008* can be seen to be always devising a plan as to how she should pretend and be with all the men that she comes across in order to exceed their pride, cater to it, or seemingly be destroying it, for them to fall for even more. These men are presented as serious, rich, and sensitive intellectuals who can only be trapped using Adriana's body and her will to pursue them while pretending to be nonchalant in order to cater to their pride. Men's sensitivities and rational mindedness can also be observed when Adriana's friend Leigh, a woman near to her

thirties, is confused about whether she wants to marry her fiancé and yet says yes to his proposal. On the other hand, her fiancé is a calm and collected being who knows what he is doing and who opens up and shares his vulnerabilities with Leigh. Leigh mistakenly sleeps with an author named Jesse from her work, whose book she is editing. She is unable to make any wise decision on her part or to act in the way she wants and voice her opinions to the men in her life. Even when she finally gathers up the courage to refuse to marry her fiancé, she has already slept with another man who becomes the cause for her to have spoken up. On the other hand, Jesse shares with Leigh anything that he has on his mind. He is portrayed as a complex being whom Leigh is unable to figure out. She starts to pay more attention on how she dresses and looks. On their first meeting, Leigh is shown spending hours getting ready and choosing the right type of outfit that is sexy yet professional. Several of these instances are the highlights of these girls' lives. Similarly, their third friend Emmy who has started on a new travelling job which seems more like a way for her to fulfil her sex voyage and find herself through that. Emmy is shown to be seemingly transforming into a better version of herself when she meets a new man daily in front of whom she hides her true self, which is a woman who cannot live a sex-fueled life and instead wants a relationship. Emmy is shown to be trying the most to conform into a person who just wants sex and pretends to be fun and free. She is only ever choosing to wear sexier costumes so as to enhance her sexuality, as she does not have a body like her friend Adriana whom she looks up to. The men she comes across are uninterested in staying with her for long term, and are shown as just hedonists. Gill writes that these men are shown to just be "wanting a shag" (Gill, "Postfeminist Media Culture" 151) while women are trying their very best to fulfil the requirement of being feminine and being worthy of them. Emmy also comes across a man named Paul, who Paul, who is smart, caring, sensitive, handsome, and rich. Paul signals a slight interest in Emmy and the rest is carried out by her. She is taught by Adriana on how to lure him in and keep him to be hers.

In Elizabeth Gilbert's *City of Girls, 2019*, the character of Vivian along with her fellow girls at the theater, all of them are grouped in a sexually active and appealing bubble. Their lives revolve mainly around the theater work and sleeping around. Vivian's friend Celia Ray encourages her to go out and get entertained and create a life for herself. When both develop a friendship and start going out every

night, this entertainment and getting a life is sleeping with a new man each night and have them admire their bodies. All the girls at the theater are presented by Gilbert in a severely sexual manner. The show girls have the sole jobs of jiggling their body parts and entertain the audience, while men are only ever shown to be doing complex, humorous or other type of profound roles. Not only this, but these girls also sleep with Dr. Kellogg for extra cash to treat themselves with luxuries. Gilbert expertly excludes this from any kind of prostitution and justifies all of this with the notion of consumer spending which is a necessity for the girls in order for them to enjoy life. The character of Mr. Herbert, who also lives with Vivian and all the girls in her aunt's theater house, is one with profound dialogues and a distinct personality. He writes all the plays and spends most of his time alone. Regardless of his writings and scripts, all the credit goes to the show girls with voluptuous figures and moves. Their item is being presented at the end of each show for which the audience waits impatiently and applauds the loudest. Gilbert calls it entertainment of the highest class. Furthermore, Vivian's aunt also has her ex-husband Billy who is always coming to meet. When Vivian and her aunt make the biggest and the most well written play of the theater, it is Billy who directs it, writes it and gives money for more expenses that are needed to prepare such a high level show. Through this, it is vividly noticeable that it is Billy who brings a creative and a distinct new makeover of the show. It is him who writes it and has the audience in awe of the dialogues; and it is him who gives the resources along with the daring sentiment to go on towards creating a huge, different show that is a risk. Billy is shown to be motivating each and every member of the show, from Vivian's Aunt Peg to the musicians of the show. In a way, it is Billy who holds all the authority and intellect, who is motivated to do more and acts towards doing more. Aunt Peg calls him to save the day and give reality to her plan. Henceforth, women only apparently seem to be having authority over men and themselves, when they exist in the illusory bubble of sexuality and believe their bodies to be the tools to attain power. Gill compares all such representations of men and women in order to explain sexualisation. Women are solely represented as sexual beings, following the femininity standards, and being "monitors of sexual relationships" (Gill, "Postfeminist Media Culture" 151). They are considered to be responsible for acquiring a desirable appearance, and manage entertaining and satisfying men sexually. This makes up for a confined particular representation of femininity and the female gender while designating and deciding its responsibilities. Through this

sexualisation, women subconsciously submit to the power dynamic that continues while believing to have all the control and authority. Regardless of being employed like Emmy and Leigh, or enjoying the riches like Adriana, all the characters look towards finding a rich man for it gives them the sense of security that there will be someone to look after them and they would have the money to spend and appear sexy for them. Women are not possessed by men, but rather by the feminine standards which have been internalized into the system through such discourses and their sexualization.

The neoliberal woman who “has it all” (Gill, “Postfeminist Media Culture” 161) conforms to the definition of femininity, acquiring feminine styles and molding herself so as to feel herself in control and valued. Gill further explains this neoliberal woman by referencing to Angela McRobbie’s notion of “entanglement of feminist and anti-feminist ideas” (“Postfeminist Media Culture” 161) and highlights the postfeminist identity whose female construction is representative of this entanglement. Gill explains the postfeminist identity and highlights its specifically designed conflicting articulation. In the postfeminist culture, the feminist school of thought is revised and then proliferated through sexualization (“Postfeminist Media Culture” 149). McRobbie terms this as “double entanglement” (“Postfeminist Media Culture” 255) and highlights the neoliberal values that a postfeminist identity incorporates. The neoliberal values include the necessity to evolve into a better version of oneself and elevate the psyche to only see life in a positive manner, ready to be taking power in one’s hand. To acquire this, a woman’s body is her source of power and value through which she can take all the authority. Hence, each individual woman is responsible and required to upgrade herself to be valued, while other ways of oppression, abuse and blatant scrutiny of the female gender remains ignored and becomes embedded in the patriarchal system even more through postfeminist ideals that women have come to pursue.

““What a bunch of figures on you gals!” he said, and Jennie said, “Now, don’t you get fresh, mister,” but I could tell that she liked it” (Gilbert 86). The internalization, acceptance, and proliferation of postfeminist ideals through which scrutiny and hostile objectification of women has become normalized with women trying to pursue these criteria and ideals. In addition to that, the normalization of sexism has taken a step further to its acceptance and want. Women accept the

masculine gaze and their objectification due to their body being the source of their worth and power for them. Jennie is shown to not only be accepting, but also feeling pleased with a stranger's remark on her figure. The need to feel worthy is fulfilled through men's admiration of women's bodies, or in this sense, their objectification. Women are shown to not only be appearing as someone that they are not, but also secretly being fond of such men and their remarks at their bodies. They are miserably hungry for a man's evaluation of their body in their favor and their approval of it.

"Now that I'd been initiated, I wanted to be around sex constantly—and everything about New York felt like sex to me. I had a lot of time to make up for, was how I saw it. I'd wasted all those years being bored and boring, and now I refused to be bored or boring ever again, not even for an hour!" (Gilbert 88). The glorification of sex through sexualized representations brings a divide among women who glorify and enjoy it and those who do not. Women who are presented in sexualized contexts are deemed to be more fun and able, while un-sexualized versions of women are scrutinized and termed as dull, boring, and bland. Vivian gives a clear picture of the "striptease culture" (McNair 2002) through this passage in which she is openly presenting herself to sex, to pleasure and desire. When Rosalind Gill talks about the sexualization of culture, she highlights the ways in which sex is represented through media and chick lit to its female audience. Girls who are into sex and live a sexually active life are presented in a youthful manner, through which they seem to be evolving into pornographic females who are always "up for it" (Gill, "Postfeminist Media Culture" 150). The molding of chick lit discourse into a pornographic genre can be clearly understood by Gilbert's characterization of Vivian. Due to such representations of women in chick lit, the male fantasy that is created through pornography gets legitimized and normalized, instead of it being opposed and rejected. Women not only accept these requirements for being feminine, but also aspire to be them. The female identity gets minimized to being only carnal and desirable. Vivian's hunger to want to live a sexually active life is the characterization of a postfeminist ideal. Every woman should be ready to enjoy or initiate hard-core sexual performances to deem herself to be worthy of men, if anything else.

Celia and Vivian's characters can also be compared to Weisberger's Emmy and Adriana. Adriana is seen to be liking every other handsome man she finds, and is unable to commit to a single man. Even while she is finally in relationship with the

famous director Toby, she still finds herself to be attracted to someone she meets on a plane ride. The element of being unself-conscious while still being of value is highly contradictory. However, the glorification of the female body and the sexualization of female gender makes it possible for her character to be well liked and admired by everyone in the book. Similarly, the character of Emmy decides to go on a sex spree in order to become better and find out her true identity of who she really is. Emmy is hesitant at first, but is shown to be liking the sexual intensity in her life to a whole new level. She is shown to be only ever talking to her friends about how filthy or how intense her last sexual encounter was. Emmy's whole identity starts to be revolving around her body and its use in the right way. Weisberger shows both Adriana and Emmy in a severely sexualized manner with their clothing and their conversations that only ever revolve around what to wear so as to reveal more and how to gain appraisal of men through their bodies. The character of Celia Ray, to whom Vivian looks up to and calls to be a "goddess" (Gilbert 36) because of her voluptuous body, has hardly any description given to her character than how much she enjoys being desired by other men and the uncountable times she has had slept with them.

The need to appear desirable and the hunger for sex in such a casual manner as demonstrated through the female characters gives a deep insight into the way that feminine gender is being sexualized. The legitimation of this culture is also explained through its commercially driven nature that Gill mentions. She terms the unself-conscious and youthful presentation of adult females as their "girlification" (Gill, "Postfeminist Media Culture" 151). This propagates a youthful version of adult women as young girls whose bodies have the capacity to be the most sexual version of themselves to seduce a man. Such is the characterization of Adriana, Emmy, Leigh, and Vivian. This also promotes sexism with the acceptance of women's sexualized evaluations and representations through consumer culture posing to be a new and informed position of power.

"The moment the show was over, Celia and I would change into the thinnest little stalks of evening gowns, and we would absolutely fling ourselves at the city" (Gilbert 89). While referring to media culture and chick lit with its commercially driven nature, the above mentioned quote is an accurate example of the way young females are propagated in a sexualized manner which is carried out here by the ways Vivian and Celia dress up before going out each night. Through "girlification", the

chick lit genre has concealed pornographic characterizations of young girls and women into either enthusiastic and fun-loving girls or aesthetically pleasing women.

“In the course of these heady evenings, we would either meet up with some men whom Celia already knew, or we would pick up some new men along the way. Or both. I would either kiss three handsome men in a row, or the same handsome man three times—sometimes it was hard to keep track” (Gilbert 89). Writing the letter to Angela, Vivian shares with her the beginning of her friendship with Celia Ray. This journey traces the element of female sexualisation and what Gill also terms as “girlification” (Gill, “Postfeminist Media Culture” 151). Both Vivian and Celia are shown to be giving themselves away to strangers, whether it be boys or older men. They are both shown to be extremely hungry for *fun* and adventure. However, the definition of fun that Gilbert gives to her audience is to lose count of how many boys or men they kiss and still go on for more. Through this portrayal of Vivian, the sole source of enjoyment for her is being physical and hungry, always, and forever. Similarly, Weisberger constructs the character of Emmy to be an innocent being, who evolves into a sexualized woman after pledging to have sex with a new man she finds in each continent as she goes travelling for work. More importantly, regardless of Emmy being an adult woman who is about to be thirty, her character is presented as a girl who is eager and ready to jump into bed with the next handsome guy she finds. Emmy’s adulthood is masked through her patterned characterization in which she appears carefree, playful, and lively. However, all notions of femininity are attached to her being lively and carefree. Only through the manner in which she uses her body deems her fulfilling to the definition of being feminine, fun, and desirable. The element of hunger that is induced in these characters by the respective authors does not only define their identity, but also defines femininity for women. When chick lit genre is analyzed through such female writings, it is more likely to be called porno chick due to such illustrations of female characters. In relation to this, the men that Emmy comes across are shown to be admiring all such features in a woman; making it seem like a requirement for the female gender to transform her into this identity to not only feel worthy but also fulfil men’s pornographic fantasies. Indeed, such characterization points towards the woman consisting of pornographic features. This not only presents a woman to be always hungry for more, but also open to all kinds of male interaction and conforming to sexism.

“Men looked at Celia Ray like she was a box of Cracker Jack and they couldn’t wait to start digging for the toy” (Gilbert 90). While the woman is shown to be performing sexually and bringing herself to the table, the element of men’s sexism with its hostile treatment of the woman goes unnoticed. The man is only identified as a harmless being, who is solely seeking either pleasure through a woman’s body and its gross objectification, or he is seeking a woman worthy of his money and his masculinity. Hence, the man is quite simply and effortlessly given all authority over the woman, and is allowed to influence her with his wants and his definition of her femininity. However much in power and in control a woman is, the hegemonic masculinity works through the blurred layers and remains unjudged. Gill points towards these standards of femininity and the apparent authoritative position that a postfeminist woman seems to have. She brings forth the “blurred boundaries” between chick lit genre and the other genres while calling it “porno chic” (Gill, “Postfeminist Media Culture” 152). Sexualization and its propagation has put the woman under a microscope while the ways in which sexism is endorsed and accepted remains out of question. Under the artifice of ‘having fun’, there is only the sexualized female version that one finds to be operating actively and vehemently. This intense focus on sexualized female identity is what Gill puts under the notion of “girlification” (Gill, “Postfeminist Media Culture” 151). She talks about eroticized versions of young girls who act older, yet provide the audience with a youthful and entertaining emotion. The girls are termed as “chicks” which puts them neither in the category of women, nor in the category of innocent girls. Rather, it creates a new identity of the female gender in which the sexualized versions get accepted with the merging of feminist and anti-feminist ideas. According to Rosalind Gill, the merging of both these ideas brings forth a new idealized postfeminist identity who is represented as extremely sensual and in pursuit of its desires. Hence, postfeminism is neither feminist, nor antifeminist, rather it is a new representational regime that legitimizes itself through sexualisation and the “striptease culture”, propagated through chick lit, media, and magazines, (Gill, McNair).

The sexualization of women in chick lit discourse has decided women’s only role and purpose to appear as desirable sexual beings with their accomplishment demarcated as satisfying the male gender. This sexualization appears in different modes of manner; Gill defines it to either be “youthful” and “unself-conscious” or

requiring women to sexually upgrade themselves and their lifestyle (“Postfeminist Media Culture” 149). The female gender is represented as one who is the monitor of all sexual relationships, whose responsibility is to not only appear herself as sexually desiring but to also please the male gender (Gill, “Postfeminist Media Culture” 150). Through this portrayal of postfeminist female characters, it has come to gather a close resemblance to pornography and its commercial nature has enhanced the consumer spending, whilst holding women to be playing the role of a higher entity who willfully sexualizes herself and has become valuable.

4.4. Subjectification

Rosalind Gill talks about the elements of a postfeminist sensibility in which one of these is subjectification. In order to help understand the notion of subjectification, she first explains how in the past, the objectification of female gender has highlighted the way in which women have been viewed as objects to the male gaze. Men have openly commodified women and treated them as objects for pleasure, while women have been portrayed as passive and silent objects (Gill, “Postfeminist Media Culture” 150). Subjectification is the representation of women as active, desiring and dominant female subjects. The female gender is no longer portrayed as silent and submissive. In the chick lit novels, the postfeminist characters are neither fulfilling the role of being sexual objects, nor are they traditional mute and submissive women. The postfeminist woman flaunts her body by her own will and desire, she controls the man through her dominant sexuality instead of becoming only a sex object to him. In the novels being analyzed, unlike commodification or objectification, subjectification portrays women as active and enthralling sexual subjects (Gill, “Postfeminist Media Culture” 152).

Gill writes in her article *From Sexual Objectification to Sexual Subjectification: The Resexualisation of Women’s Bodies in the Media, 2009* that “sexual subjectification has turned out to be objectification in new and even more pernicious guise” (“Postfeminist Media Culture” 105) in which women are not straight forwardly objectified by men, but are “resexualized” under the guise of “girl power” and “women’s success” (Gill, “Postfeminist Media Culture” 102-03). Women are no longer mere objects who are objectified by the dominant man and under the dominant hierarchical system. Subjectification is defined by Gill to be a crucial shift that postfeminism brings forth. This is a shift or evolution of the female gender from

objectification to subjectification. It demonstrates an assertive and distinct voice that the female gender acquires, which takes her away from being a “mute” entity anymore (Gill, “Postfeminist Media Culture” 150). The source for women due to which they are able to achieve this voice is their body and its sexualized nature. The shift indicates a woman’s body to be no longer objectified or humiliated by the hegemonic masculine, but rather, it is wanted and desired (required) by him. The woman is shown to be valued and admired on the basis of her sexualized figure. This active and desiring female subject’s accomplishment is connected to her femininity and her body. In addition to this, the definition of femininity underlines the identity of the female subject who seems to be in control and no longer subjugated. Gill connects the empowered postfeminist subject with the neoliberal subject and the ways in which both are similar, yet the postfeminist female subject is deemed to be distinct and moving towards its progression. Through Gill’s exploration of the shift in female representation, the working of sexualization helps understand subjectification. The female gender’s sexualization is carried out by making her an alluring feminine subject than a submissive object (Gill, “Postfeminist Media Culture” 150). “Sexualization creates a specific identity of women and re-presents their definition of femininity, which seems to be upgraded, when in fact it carefully reinstates the traditional femininity. The difference being only those women willfully choose to become a sexual object, and their direct objectification no longer transpires” (Goldman 147). Robert Goldman, the author of the book *Reading Ads Socially, 1992*, writes about the way ads portray female sexualization. It is to mention here that this female representation is not only restricted to the postfeminist chick lit genre, but has a broader cultural connection due to the commercially driven nature of female sexualization (Gill, “Postfeminist Media Culture” 151). Goldman writes, “... men once dominated women on the basis of proprietary claims made on the body of woman; today, male domination gets reproduced on the basis of women acquiring proprietary control over their own bodies—or, over the appearances given off by their bodies” (Goldman 125). Gill references Goldman and explains the way women present themselves as sexual subjects due to their “liberated interests” that motivates them (Goldman 147). In Gilbert’s female characterization, Vivian and Celia can be clearly analyzed as sexual subjects who invite sexualization by the male gender while themselves being demonstrated as powerful, desirous subjects.

“All she had to do was show up, and every bit of sexual energy in the place would magnetize around her. Then she’d stroll around looking bored as can be—sopping up everyone’s boyfriends and husbands in the process—without exerting the slightest bit of effort in her conquests” (Gilbert 90). Vivian introduces the effect her friend Celia Ray has when they go outside to have fun. It can be analyzed the way a sexually alluring female subject is constructed and the way that authority and value is given to this subject based on its appearance and sexuality. Celia is defined as a desirous and domineering female subject solely due to her how she presents herself in front of men. This diverse female characterization is not only created as a source of entertainment on the surface, but it is also formed to distribute it among the female audience and gain advantage from its commercial nature. Women are being fascinated by such characterization of themselves through which they can find their lost value. The male admiration is a self-pass that is accomplished when the fine-looking female body is being approved and desired by the man. The way that power plays in such postfeminist constructions is crucial to understand the element of subjectification. The free and empowered female subject is not only the master of its body, but also of the external factors, made to have a connection with it. Women are shown to be not only winning men’s hearts by following their desires and internalizing authority from their sexuality. A woman’s eroticized lifestyle and their sensual beauty are also presented to be the only goal to achieve, due to their body being their source of identity. Therefore, a woman’s sexual body and lifestyle is not only a self-defining trait, but also a self-governing trait for women. Celia is a woman who has all the autonomy as she enters a restaurant, and every male gaze follows her. Due to power that she can assert due to her sexuality, she can have anyone’s husband or boyfriend, without her making any attempts at them or doing any hard work. Gill highlights the autonomy that heterosexual female subjects are given which is then sold to chick lit and media’s widespread female audience.

“We were *stunning*. We could give whole tables of men a pretty decent case of whiplash, just by walking past. “Fetch us a refresher,” Celia would say at the bar, to nobody in particular, and in the next moment, five men would be handing us cocktails—three for her, and two for me” (Gilbert 90). The female subject’s body, and her ability to flaunt it in every possible way, is symbolic of power and influence over the others. This excludes the idea that power can reside in a woman’s any other

particular characteristics. Furthermore, this subject is shown to be using her sexual autonomy through which she becomes able to get whatever she wants. With the explanation of postfeminist sensibility, it is important to mention the notion of femininity. According to Rosalind Gill, the shift from objectification to subjectification brings forth a new modified form of femininity. She terms this as the “modernisation of femininity” in which femininity is defined to have evolved into an updated, powerful form (Gill, “Postfeminist Media Culture” 150). It is upgraded and restructured in order to distribute it to the female gender and proliferate it through its commercially driven nature.

You see, it was like this: Celia’s effect on men was to make them so obedient and subservient to her—until the instant they were no longer obedient and subservient. She would have them all lined up before us, ready to take our orders and serve our every wish. They were such good boys—but sometimes, quite suddenly, those boys were not so good anymore. Some line of male desire or anger would be crossed, and then there was no coming back from it. After that line had been crossed, Celia’s effect on men was to make them into savages. (Gilbert 95)

One of the aspects of “modernisation of femininity” (Gill, “Postfeminist Media Culture” 150) is defined by Gill as a self-obsessed view of women of themselves. Through this, the characters of Celia and Vivian are not only boasting off their power over men, but also using this power for means that only create chaos in a society where the only goal is to lust after the woman’s body and to use a woman’s body to get what one wants. Henceforth, the acquisition of this self is not only damaging for oneself, but also others. The power that the female subject seems to acquire is analyzed by placing light on the idea of power that comes to gain a significant and fundamental position through female subjectification. The idea of power indicates towards the way power operates in a hierarchical system. The female subject who seems to be making use of her authority believes that she has gained a position of power and dominancy by shifting from being a submissive mute object to a sexually active subject. This autonomous position that a woman seems to have acquired through this shift is way more “exploitative” in nature than the one that she has experienced before (Gill, “Postfeminist Media Culture” 151). Rosalind Gill analyzes this autonomous position of women and how power operates through it. She addresses the “internalised” female objectification and compares it to the external

“male gaze” (“Postfeminist Media Culture” 151), both combine to create the postfeminist female subject. A woman’s self-obsession is what comes as the outcome of this shift; previously in which the man’s gawking eye and examination of the woman’s body was observed to be operating. This new form i.e., subjectification, in which power has come to operate, is more abusive in nature than objectification because the female gender has internalized and accepted the sexism of men and the male gaze. Gill explores the power operation and indicates towards the operating of a new system that does not directly force its authority over a woman, but constructs the notion of subjectification through which a “new regime” gets internalized (“Postfeminist Media Culture” 151). The “agency” that women are being granted with is not simply on their ability to mold themselves into a distinct identity but on the basis that this identity should duplicate the masculine gender’s pornographic fantasy (Gill, “Postfeminist Media Culture” 151). Therefore, women are only allowed this agency if they are able to change into pornographic version of themselves. In addition, regardless of the disguise of power that the notion of subjectivity brings, its close similarity with pornography shows its unrelated nature when real human sexuality is analyzed (Turner).

The postfeminist subject presented through chick lit discourse is highly contradictory in nature when it is compared with real life human sexuality. The writer and journalist Janice Turner talks about these female subjects and the nature of their contradictory identity that is getting normalized through popular culture. Subjective authority that is being given to Celia Ray due to which she can get any man to be at her disposal at any time is result of the new regime that has gotten internalized, as mentioned by Gill. The character of Emmy is able to transform into a sexual subject and get rid of her objectified self by becoming a sexually active figure. Emmy shifts from being a mere object for her ex-boyfriend Duncan and remodel into a sexualized better version of herself who is always ready to be taken by a man and always concerned about her sexuality, body and appearance that are the source of her transformed valued self. Only after Emmy dares to take the sole responsibility of her life, which is the core neoliberal value, does she evolve into a “sex-puppet” (Turner) and becomes able to take on subjectivity and gain autonomy. Her friend Adriana is the one whom Weisberger shows to be bestowing wisdom upon her friends solely in the matters of refining one’s body, appearance, and sexual conduct with men. Adriana

is portrayed by the author as an empowered woman whose authority and success are a result of her sexual body and her sexualized lifestyle. Due to this characterization of hers, she is constructed as a successful expert through whom subjectification gains validation. In Adriana's characterization of subjectivity, her modernized femininity and narcissism is used to create a desiring and valued female subject who is the example of a successful sexual subject. Weisberger specifically makes Adriana's chest enhancement to be her characteristic of dominance that deems her to be better and more successful than other women. Janice Turner mentions this element where a woman acquires a better self and worth after she purchases an alluring form of herself. Turner analyzes a magazine's content and writes, "Zoo had more than 200 entries to its competition to "win a boob job for your girlfriend", a prize to "transform her into a happier, more generous, intelligent, spiritual, interesting ... version of the slightly second-rate person she is today" (Turner). Women's femininity, that defines their value, becomes validated due to the authority that gets associated with the specific sensual figure which is feminine in its essence. Turner describes this eroticized femininity and writes further, "Who these days would label images of Abi Titmuss, on all fours, offering her thonged bottom..., as degrading? Or think that the "breast quest", in which men send in pictures of their girlfriends' bosoms to be rated by FHM journalists... - is objectifying women, chopping them up into their constituent sexual parts?" (Turner). Gill references the writer and journalist Janice Turner and explains how women's sexualization is a graver mode of exploitation that is not objectification from the past, but a new subjectivity along with its internalization into a new regime that deems sexuality to be authoritative and subjective than it being degrading or objectifying the female gender.

"You *are* my niece. How disheartening. I suppose the family wouldn't approve if I ravaged you. I might not even approve of myself if I ravaged you—I've become so moral in my old age. Alas, alas. Is the other one my niece, too? I hope not. She doesn't look like she could be anyone's niece" (Gilbert 140). When Vivian's uncle Billy finds her and Celia sleeping in his old room at the theater house, he keeps staring at them as they sleep until Vivian wakes up. She is shocked to find a man staring at them. When her uncle comes to know that she is her niece, as they meet after many years, he shows how sexually appealing does he find her. Gilbert does not show any concern from her character's older self about how a grown man treats his

nieces. Vivian accepts her uncle's sexist remarks, in the calmest manner. Such a manner is one that a sensual and liberated woman is expected to possess in the face of men's sexism. Gill relates this sexism to irony and writes, "In postfeminist media culture, irony has become a way of 'having it both ways', of expressing sexist, homophobic or otherwise unpalatable sentiments in an ironized form, while claiming this was not actually 'meant'... if we suspend our disbelief in the notion that it is 'just a laugh', we are left with a fast-growing area of content that is chillingly misogynist, inviting men to evaluate women only as sexual items" ("Postfeminist Media Culture" 159-160). The nature of Billy's character who does not take himself and others too seriously and makes ironic remarks fits the description that Gill brings forward. In chick lit, such character description is made use of in order to deliver any and every type of misogynistic remarks regarding women while keeping the comical tone alive. Along with this, more importantly, the subjective nature of both the characters Vivian and her friend Celia, is distinctly patterned and is working under any and every circumstance. Billy's remark on Celia being no one's niece on the basis of her appearance is delivered in the most casual manner. "This casual, comical, and playful nature through which female subjectification is shown is more complicated than merely a laughing matter" (Gill, "Postfeminist Media Culture" 160). The way that women's entire identity is constructed in such a manner is highlighted as extremely problematic by Gill. The shift from objectification to subjectification constructs a woman's identity to be more malleable than authoritative. Furthermore, a woman who is not sexy, rejects sexism and men's fantasies, falls to a mediocre "second-rate" (Turner) self that needs to be upgraded. The sexualisation of culture and the propagation of sexualized discourses constructs the definition of femininity and legitimizes it. However, the way that this sexualization and subjectification comes into play, is analyzed by studying deep into how these notions and representations are distributed, monitored, and legitimized.

But of course, he's a playboy, darling. What handsome man worth his salt is not? Though Billy is a special sort. There are a million playboys out there, you must understand, but they don't typically enjoy a woman's company past the obvious gratifications. A man who gets to conquer all the women he wants, but who does not prize any of them? Now, *that* is a man to be avoided. But Billy genuinely likes women, whether he's vanquishing them or not. We've always had a wonderful time

together, he and I. He'd be just as happy talking with me about fashion as trying to seduce me. (Gilbert 157)

Through this passage, the legitimization of subjectification of the female gender at the hands of men can be observed. When Vivian describes Billy's character, she describes the ways in which he is a womanizer and a hedonist. The aspect to highlight here is how Vivian herself, her aunt Peg and other girls at the theater allow Billy to womanize them and rather enjoy his casual philandering. Through Billy's womanizing nature and its acceptance, Gilbert regards sexually feminine attributes to her female characters and feminizes them. This feminization is part of the legitimization of sexualization through chick lit discourse that is portrayed under the guise of subjectification. The chick lit discourse then gets distributed with the female gender's characterization by means of the concept of subjectification. The female characters portrayed as dominant subjects are shown to be complying to their sexualization in order to appear powerful and in control. Henceforth, the notion of sexualization and its normalization to such an extent, in any form, is shown to be giving power to a woman and the subjectified nature of her newly built identity. Women are imparted with subjectivity and agency under the circumstance that they allow a sexualized version of themselves and construct their identity around it. This identity demands not only building a particular kind of body, but also constructing a pornographic identity that allows sexualization of an individual and her distinct characterization (Gill, "Postfeminist Media Culture" 152).

She couldn't remember the last time she'd bought anything sexy or even cute, but she couldn't resist this when she'd spotted it in the window. The softness of its pink jersey material felt amazing when it clung to her body, and the sheer green lace scalloping around the neckline made it comfy, casual, and sexy all in one. Adriana would be so proud, she thought, smiling. (Weisberger 245)

One of the main features of chick lit is the element of consumer culture being played out through subjectification of female characters. The rise in consumer culture can be observed at large in both the novels discussed here. Female characters depicted by Lauren Weisberger and Elizabeth Gilbert follow all the set standards of beauty and work towards acquiring a particular subjectified self. This distinct form of womanhood is achieved majorly as a result of consumer spending and adhering to a feminine self. Furthermore, women are made responsible for maintaining a feminine

self and monitor their bodies and sexuality in order to appear ever more domineering and alluring to the male gender. This monitoring of the self requires excessive consumer spending that seemingly makes a woman more attractive and valuable. Gill highlights that this particular feminine self is examined and scrutinized by men and women both, for its imperfections. Women who do not follow these feminine and beauty standards are then deemed ignorant and unworthy. Consumer culture also plays a huge role in the distribution of chick lit discourse among young and adult women. The female characters are built in such a way that they either portray consumer spending as a necessity in living a successful life, or they are in a constant rush of becoming better through it and transforming themselves through it to attain fulfillment. In addition to that, the proliferation of chick lit discourse with consumer culture covering a major part of it further legitimizes the sexualization in chick lit and subjectification of the female gender. Due to the transformation, success, and fulfillment that consumer culture is shown to be providing, women thrive to give their lives meaning through the drastic psychological and physical effects that it brings. In the above-mentioned passage from the book, Emmy finding herself to be irresistible along with being comfortable with her alluring feminine figure is representative of the normalization of a sexualized female subject who is being granted agency on the basis of her sexuality. The author presents her body and her sexuality as a monitor for her life. Rosalind Gill explains this eroticization of female gender as the 'sexualization of culture', in which women are displayed as erotic subjects, always being 'up for it'. Notions like female empowerment, freedom and choice, individualism and authority are used in chick lit for women to be made subservient to models of beauty which lets the patriarchal patterns of dominance prevail. When Emmy thinks of Adriana being proud of her transformed desirous self, she not only deems Adriana to be a figure of power, but is also shown to be seeing Adriana in a state of fulfillment.

All such effects of consumer spending and a sexual body put women under examination and convey how they can become a powerful and esteemed feminine version of themselves. Henceforth, notions of femininity as a bodily property and the use of body as the source of identity and power is interlinked with subjectification while creating a female subject. The subjective notion not only gets internalized, but also makes the female gender conform to societal norms of femininity and sexuality. This conformation not only makes women unconsciously subservient while them

believing that they have achieved equality, but it also keeps feminist issues unresolved and away from the spotlight.

4.5. Individualism

Individualism refers to choice and empowerment; freedom of choice and taking autonomy come under the notion of being relying on one's own unique self and being responsible to elevate it. Postfeminist Sensibility underlines the element of individualism in postfeminist media culture and in postfeminism in chick lit. Rosalind Gill mentions the exclusion of all political and cultural influences, with life's every aspect being "refracted through the idea of personal choice and self-determination" ("Postfeminist Media Culture" 153). The idea of an empowered female subject also has its connection with the notion of individualism. An empowered female subject is portrayed with a distinct identity, granted with the freedom to choose to do anything that she wishes. Women are conferred with 'choice' because of having an eroticized personality and figure that is made to be distinct and dynamic. This dynamic character's actions are regarded to be entirely freely chosen by the female subject, without any social forces. The role of culture, politics and the effect of social norms is fully exempted while portraying this transformed and distinct identity. Gill mentions that a woman's life's each and every decision is made using the idea of individualistic self-help, taking autonomy and exercising freedom of choice. Individualism embraces "being oneself" and "pleasing oneself", which are regarded central to postfeminist sensibility by Gill ("Postfeminist Media Culture" 153). There is no other lens through which the empowered subject's actions are observed or evaluated.

In *Chasing Harry Winston, 2008*, one of the main female character Adriana is shown to be getting breast enhancement, which not only shows consumer culture and its effects that make a woman's character worthy of praise, but also makes her subservient to social norms. However, this road to subjectification underlines the idea of individualism as its base, demonstrating a woman to be is choosing all her actions and priorities. Gill highlights the idea of individualism being used by chick lit authors as the characters' core defining trait of their identity. Women are shown to be solely pursuing pleasure to feel good about themselves while all other factors do not hold any impact on their lives. The individualism being portrayed is achieved by women while they are only going towards sources that please them. The notion of transforming the female characters in order to make a sexualized appearance of them

is represented as a freely chosen wish of women through which they come to feel good and fulfilled in life. Gill mentions the social pressures and standards that the female gender has started following. These social norms and pressures seem to be veiled under a sexualized, subjective, and individualistic identity which provides women with solutions to all kinds of problems that they face. Women urge towards acquiring these beauty standards to feel elevated and unique. Weisberger's character of Adriana is not presented as a follower of feminine beauty standards or social norms, but as a woman who is looked upon and admired due to her unique highly sexual body which she acquires after getting breast implants. Her figure gives her agency over other women while her individuality is defined solely by her freedom of choosing to be herself and pleasing herself through her acquisition of the perfect feminine sexuality. Gill argues that women are always shown to be lacking or in need of constant monitoring, as they are individualistic beings responsible for maintaining their individuality, which is reflected only through their body and sexuality. When Adriana says that she and her friends need to get men, she also mentions with it that their bodies will not remain the same as they get older. This condition points towards women having to constantly examine their bodies, ensure consumer spending and make use of it in order to conform to perceptions of being an attractive female. As long as they can maintain this specific individuality, it is all they need to get a man, a job, fame and riches, and fulfilment.

The concentration on women's bodies being a source of distinctiveness and power for them is also used in the chick lit novel *City of Girls, 2019* in order to create female subjects whose selfhood and individuality is shown through their sole freedom to please themselves and use their sexuality which is portrayed as a gateway to becoming an accomplished woman. A concrete example of this can be seen from the character of Emmy, who after transforming from a bland and average version of herself into a new and sexualized dominant subject, all through individualistic self-help, starts gaining men's attention and success in all parts of her life. She is granted with agency on the basis of having acquired a transformed version of herself. Women possessing sexual subjecthood and such a lifestyle or working towards acquiring it are shown to be exercising freedom of choice and taking autonomy of their lives. In order to find pleasure and fulfilment, getting a transformation is then depicted as a personal choice than merely being subservient to social norms or feminine standards of beauty

and sexuality. Gill highlights women's independence and self-governance to the absence and obliviousness to power imbalances and gender injustices that still exist at large. She criticizes the supposed freedom with which women are bestowed being represented only with the use of sexual imagery, including choosing the most revealing clothes, sexiest lingerie, breast implants, and tendency towards leading an eroticized lifestyle. Here, the notion of femininity is to be emphasized which has become internalized through individualism and subjectivity. The notion of choice by which women are shown to be choosing to please themselves and defining themselves distinctly, connects the sexual subjecthood of women. The eroticized femininity then becomes part of this distinct individuality, through which female subjects are shown to be gaining power. Therefore, female subjectivity's roots are connected to the notion of individualism in which choice and empowerment are justified through the outcome of dominant female subject. In the feminine figures of chick lit, more feminine characteristics are embedded in the seemingly assertive and autonomous female characters (Gill, "Postfeminist Media Culture" 150-152).

While analyzing the nature of the notion of individualism, Gill questions that "when women are presented as free individual subjects who only want to please themselves and make themselves feel good, does not fully justify, nor describe, as to 'why' their ultimate authoritative subjective figures resemble the standard feminine figure which consists of a full chest, slender waist, firm behinds, and a shaved body" ("Postfeminist Media Culture" 154). She mentions that women wanting to look in such particular ways to please themselves which is being defined as a liberally spawned desire ignores the broader picture and the embedded concerns in it. The culturally designed eroticized beauty standards are internalized through this process with which it also gets normalized to become our individual characteristic (Gill, "Postfeminist Media Culture" 154). Here, it is essential to refer to the resemblance that exists between this independent individualistic postfeminist subject and the neoliberal subject. Gill highlights the narrative of freedom of choice in chick lit and terms it "choice biography" ("Postfeminist Media Culture" 154). This narrative of choice biography connects the postfeminist subject with the neoliberal subject. The female characters of chick lit and their aims and aspirations are shown to have significance and originality through the narrative of individualism and freedom of choice. The role of social norms, sexualized beauty standards and their control on an

individual's life is completely brought down to nothing while constructing the postfeminist individualistic identity. Gill gives the example of the chick lit novel by Helen Fielding, *Bridget Jones' Diary 1996*, in which the main character Bridget Jones wants to transform herself and acquire an alluring desirable figure. Similarly, Emmy's transformations into revealing more of her skin and wearing sexually appealing clothes, and Adriana's breast implants establish the impact and normalization of following the beauty and sexual standards under the guise of individualism and empowerment. However, this transformation is deemed as an ambition only to please herself, and not any man. Here, the notion of modernized femininity can be seen to be working in which a woman's sexual inclinations and practices are represented to be unique, empowering, and chosen freely by themselves. Gill mentions that a neoliberal feminine identity has its subject's sexual leanings to be portrayed as being always chosen with free will. The power that is being given to women is not only by having them appear sexually attractive and active but by also having men openly wanting them and finding them sexually desirable. This legitimizes women's power and individualism, by having them being wanted by the male gender, while men maintain the hierarchical setup by being openly misogynist and by identifying women from their bodies and eroticized versions.

"It had been a while since she'd done something out of the goodness of her heart for someone else; it was time she imparted some of her lessons to someone less fortunate" (Weisberger 215). When Adriana meets Mackenzie, a famous newspaper editor, the author shows her to be a woman who is less privileged in front of Adriana. The lessons that Adriana gives to Mackenzie are the ways in which she can gain power over the man sitting across her whom she finds attractive. These ways include Mackenzie to act aloof and allow herself to be viewed in a sexualized manner. Such characterization puts women in a position of power by having them appear to be seemingly pleasing themselves and being in control. Weisberger creates her character's entire identity based on such characteristics while portraying it to be individualism and autonomy on the basis of the body that Adriana possesses. Not only this, but women who do not possess these physical and psychological features are shown to be lacking autonomy, less privileged and in need of a transformation. The notion of "being oneself and pleasing oneself" (Gill, "Postfeminist Media Culture" 152) is then ascertained to be false as Mackenzie and Adriana are neither being

themselves nor are their acts designed to please themselves. Both choose their actions only to please the men, while completely abandoning their true self in order to gain a persona through which they can attract the male gender.

“I think he just liked to hear me say *yes* again and again, and I was more than happy to oblige him. “You know how pretty you are, don’t you?” he asked, once he’d locked the door behind us. “Yes,” I said. “You’re gonna come sit on this bed with me now, right?” “Yes.” “You know I’m gonna have to kiss you now, cuz of how pretty you are?” “Yes.”” (Gilbert 174-175).

““Here’s what we’re gonna do now, Vivian Morris. I’m gonna sit here on this bed, and you’re gonna stand right there, under the light, and take your dress off for me.” “Yes,” I said. (Once you start saying it, it’s so easy to keep going!)” (Gilbert 175).

The postfeminist subject and its connection with autonomy and free will is fundamental in understanding individualism. However, to seek and conform to male approval and hegemony is also seen to be working under the hood of the apparent agency being given to women. In the passage above, Gilbert shows through Vivian’s character, the acceptance of male hegemony. The seeming attention being given to Vivian’s body puts her in power and control, but her speech states otherwise. She not only accepts male hegemony, but also describes how easy it is to do so. Here, the connection between the postfeminist subject and the psychological neoliberal subject can be observed to be working. Women are apparently given autonomy, but are made to psychologically accept the standards and roles attached to femininity. Such roles are shown and made to be accepted and normalized through the romanticized settings and autonomous characters of chick lit novels.

“I was a freethinking, unbridled sensualist who had made the pursuit of sexual pleasure one of the guiding forces in her life” (Gilbert 376). By the end of the novel, when the now older aged Vivian is completing her story, she states the purpose of her life to be sexual pleasure. Vivian states that only sexuality is the energy that monitors her life and leads her through each part of her life. Hence, Gilbert brings forth her main female character’s individuality and identity to be sexual energy. She is a sensualist whose every action’s driving force is her sexuality. Through such characterization, women’s identity is defined to be mainly sensual, and their goals

must only revolve around pursuing this sexually active nature with an alluring body. Every aspect of a woman's life is led by this idea working in the background. To monitor this individuality, women follow the feminine standards of beauty and sexuality in chick lit, under sexual and romanticized settings. Vivian's freedom and autonomy is supported by defining her life's purpose and making it the central aspect of her distinct individuality.

“They're amateurs. They're little girls. They don't know the first thing about seducing or keeping a man. We're women...in every sense of the word” (Weisberger 304). Adriana's declaration of herself and her friends being a *woman* in every way comes from their ability of being sexually appealing and keeping a man due to the sexually active nature. Through her characters, Weisberger highlights the acceptance of traditional femininity and womanhood along with the neoliberal version of them. When both these versions combine, a neoliberal postfeminist individuality is created through which while women believe that after they have acquired agency, gender inequality is erased. Gill mentions that by creating gender difference through a postfeminist identity, the inequalities are molded to be perceived as pleasurable and sexual, thereby eradicating any notion of their problematic nature. This creates women's sexuality and body to be their sole source of power, which seemingly gives them a new identity and sense of worth. Adriana's declaration at the end of the book demarcates her and her friends from other women and renders them to be the bearers of femininity and sexuality while also proclaiming them to be women of power. While defining the aspect of choice and individualism in postfeminism, Gill writes, ““Prefeminist ideals are being seductively repackaged as postfeminist freedoms (Probyn, 1997)” ... Two things are clear, however: postfeminism constructs an articulation or suture between feminist and anti-feminist ideas, and this is effected entirely through a grammar of individualism that fits perfectly with neoliberalism” (Gill, “Postfeminist Media Culture” 162). Hence, individualism plays a central role in the construction of postfeminism and in women's identity through which feminist standards of beauty and sexuality are legitimized and followed.

The chick lit novels *City of Girls* and *Chasing Harry Winston* portray the female characters as assertive postfeminist subjects who possess a distinct individualism which defines their identity and grants them agency and authority. This individualism is created by internalizing the notion of femininity functioning as a

“bodily property” and defining women’s source of identity to be their bodies. However, Gill analyzes the portrayal of dominant empowered women to be disguised under a “resexualization” of women’s bodies, where resexualization denotes the shift from blatant objectification to a disguised version of it in the form of subjectification (Gill, “Sexual” 105). Here, the apparent independence and authority that is given to the female characters is on the condition that they embrace the eroticized feminine model of themselves. Along with this, the choice biography builds the narrative and portrays women to be choosing this distinct individualism without the role of any external norms i.e., consumer spending, sexual and beauty standards, sexualization of culture, having control over their actions. Women are presented as entirely free agents who choose to please themselves and acquire a unique identity that measures their worth and grants them autonomy over their lives, men, and other women as well. Through the themes brought forth by Gill in *Postfeminist Sensibility*, the postfeminist characters are observed and analyzed to be subservient to societal norms of sexuality, beauty, and consumer spending in order to conform to an attractive, sensual, and feminine model of woman. This unique woman is presented to be “having it all” because of her sexualized body and the sex-fueled lifestyle that she inhabits. The agent of power and the assertive postfeminist subject is not entirely free in her choices, after all. The sexualization of culture highlights the notion of femininity as a bodily property and its connection to identity, subjectification and individualism, which shows us the internalization of patriarchal and neoliberal standards under the guise of subjectified depiction of women in chick lit.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Postfeminism is a contemporary academic term, birthed by a major shift in the depiction of women in the West following the first and second wave of feminism during the 1990s. The female representations changed from being portrayed as objects to male hegemony or feminists who were man-haters, to powerful female subjects who invited the male sexism, thrived on it, while exhibiting a unique individuality. The examples of this shift in women's representations could be observed in media culture, workplace, consumer culture and chick lit. This form of the liberated woman came to be defined as postfeminist by theorists like Rosalind Gill, Yvonne Tasker, Diane Negra, Angela McRobbie, and Susan Douglas (Banet-Weiser).

This definition of postfeminism, which highlights the change in female identity from being a passive object to a desiring subject, was fleshed out and explained further by Rosalind Gill, a British theorist, who coined the term "Postfeminist Sensibility" to analyze postfeminism in media and chick lit discourse. Postfeminist Sensibility consists of a number of interrelated themes, including subjectification; femininity as a bodily property; sexualisation of culture; individualism, choice and empowerment. In the contemporary era, proliferation of chick lit discourse demands an understanding of the concept of postfeminism and its influence on portrayal of women in such literature. Therefore, the notion of Postfeminist Sensibility has been used in this thesis to understand the role of postfeminism in creating female subjecthood.

In particular, an analysis of chick lit female characters from Elizabeth Gilbert's *City of Girls* and Lauren Weisberger's *Chasing Harry Winston* through the lens of Postfeminist Sensibility has been presented in this research. The thesis examined: how the two novels portray female characters' authority on their bodies, and; how subjectification and sexualized female representation play out in these books.

The researcher has analyzed women's authority on their bodies and found that female body is regarded as her source of identity and power through which she gains agency, whereas this agency is granted on the condition that they produce themselves as alluring active subjects. The notion of femininity is interlinked solely with the female body and sexuality through which a woman's identity is derived.

Through the exploration of sexualisation of culture and subjectification of women, the female characters have been examined to showcase authoritative and individual identities; having full autonomy over themselves. However, this agency and individuality is endowed upon women on the condition that they exhibit a sexy body and a sexualized lifestyle. The autonomy which women have been presented with, relates to the notion of choice. The female characters have been projected to be choosing an eroticized persona and a sensual body without the effect of any external factors. The research has found the female characters' dependency on maintaining a sexualized body and lifestyle by exploring the role and effect of societal norms, consumer culture, models/ideals of sexuality, and male desire (and male pornographic fantasy) in women's lives and on their psychological make-up. Through this dependent relationship, in which women have to follow the societal standards of beauty and sexuality, chick lit deems them to be powerful distinct individuals. The role of subjectification comes to be understood with the analysis of female characters like Emmy and Adriana's transformation into alluring dominant subjects. Women have been represented as powerful distinct subjects who have power over men and other women as long as they appear erotic and welcome examination of their bodies by the male gender. The research finds this subservience to be disguised as autonomy, as it is connected to the propagation of the idea of women achieving anything and anyone they want, along with praise and self-worth.

Gill does show postfeminism as a particularly distinct sensibility. However, at the same time, the themes instilled by her such as the portrayal of female identity, subjecthood and individualism have also been analyzed to understand postfeminism in chick lit. The analysis brings attention towards the shift from objectification to subjectification that has taken place in postfeminism. The woman, who was once a mere passive object to the male gaze, comes to have grown as an assertive and dynamic subject in chick lit. The female characters have been presented as sexualized subjects who happen to be admired and worshipped by other women and men. Their

sexual appearance or their sexually active lifestyle does not only define their value, but also their entire identity.

By analyzing women's characterization of femininity in both the novels, the research finds that an empowered woman, i.e., Adriana's character, is one who makes use of her sensuality, flaunts her physical figure fully, and invites any type of evaluation based on her appearance. A woman who lacks these characteristics is deemed to be weak, portraying failure, and lacking in her femininity. Emily's character proves that only the transformation that she goes through makes her empowered and seemingly free from a weaker version of herself. Similarly, the character of Vivian shows a lifestyle inclined towards sexuality with its pursuit to be solely sexual pleasure, is needed in order to become an autonomous subject.

The notion of female identity and femininity has methodically been analyzed while employing the inferences from Rosalind Gill's concept, through which femininity has been examined to be working as a bodily property in both the novels. Therefore, after examining the role and connection of femininity and female identity, the female identity is found to be created through a woman's body. Furthermore, the role of this new female identity is studied to be a woman's sole source of power and individuality. While studying the notion of individualism and choice portrayed through female characters, the role of power has been analyzed which reveals that women are portrayed as powerful individuals by being made to choose the facets that display them to be sexy through their attire, sexuality, and their carefree lifestyle. The thesis further unearths how this new identity of women resembles a traditional feminine woman along with the neoliberal woman, allowing the narrative for only the individual woman to be responsible for her actions than any outside force influencing them. Therefore; the beauty and sexual standards, presented with the help of consumer products and a sexually active lifestyle (having close resemblance with pornography), have been shown to be relentlessly and tirelessly pursued by the female characters, in turn granting them a distinct identity and position in a male dominated society. By analyzing postfeminism, the vast female audience of chick lit tells that more girls and women are drawn to the idea of women in power, who are able to get any man, through nothing but the use of their specifically defined femininity. The female representation which gives her the position of a subject invites more of its readers, who no longer want to either be condescending feminists opposed by men,

nor mute objects at the mercy of the male gender. Women's subjective portrayal's examination shows how it has disregarded the patriarchal inequalities and put women in the position of authority, seemingly free to choose whatever they aim and desire for, and erasing any gender inequalities. The new female subject has been analyzed to be similar to the male fantasy which is seen in pornography. Therefore, the hegemonic inequalities are internalized while women are granted agency with the single requirement for them which is to fulfill the similar subject that is fantasized by men. The female gender's personal choice of becoming a sensual goddess endows her with all the value and autonomy, distinguishing her from every other woman and regarding her to be a free and empowered subject.

The subjectification and individualism being played out in chick lit demands for enlightenment for huge measure of female audience. With a comprehensive understanding of postfeminism, the dependency relationship of women on the sexual models and beauty standards can be diminished. The feminist discourse should create more female characters with intellectual abilities and social positions in order to negate the idea of a woman who is identified by means of her body. Through the analysis of these bestseller American authors, the position of postfeminism becomes clearer as it connects to the start of feminism and brings a complete picture of a woman's journey and her position in the contemporary time. By broadening the exploration of chick lit discourse will help in fully understanding the postfeminist woman and female empowerment. Furthermore, the study of postfeminist elements will be useful in exploring and identifying more such themes through which the phenomenon of postfeminism and construction of woman empowerment can be understood in more detail. Lastly, a comparison of media representation of the postfeminist woman along with the construction of her identity with the postfeminist woman of chick lit can help in inferring where both female representations intertwine in proliferation of the idea of empowered woman and of postfeminism.

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