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The Representation of Postfeminism in American Consumer Culture

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DEDICATION

By Habib Meriem

Praise be to Allah the Lord of the worlds and may the blessings and peace of Allah be upon the most honored of messengers our master Muhammad and upon all his family and companions.

This dissertation is dedicated to,

My mother, a strong and a gentle soul who taught me to trust in Allah, believe in the hard work, and trust in my own capabilities.

My father, the only man whom I trust, he taught me the meaning of responsibility, courage, and commitment. He has always been by my side by supporting me to go forward and never look back. May Allah bless and protect my precious parents.

My two brothers Mohammed and Islam and my precious sister Amira who always encouraged and supported me in my educational journey; they were by my side whenever I went through hardships and obstacles, they didn't hesitate to offer me help any time I needed it. I ask Allah to protect my lovely family.

My outstanding partner Hacı Bouchra whose friendship was an honor to me, she worked very hard with me to accomplish our dissertation; so thank you for your friendship and thank you for your significant efforts.

Dedication

By Haci Bouchra

My deepest gratitude goes to my family, my two sisters, and to my beloved mother who has always supported and encouraged me. Without forgetting my dearest deceased father who had always wished to see me graduating.

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ABSTRACT

Postfeminism is a very crucial and highly debatable area of study, as it arises many confusions and questions in the minds of the American public. Those questions took place from postfeminists' integration in the Consumer Culture which once was forbidden by early feminists mainly first and second-wave feminists. As a result, this dissertation aspires to provide key definitions to some significant concepts, in order to serve as a baseline from which the other parts of the dissertation will rely on; in addition this research paper attempts to present each wave's points of view on consumerism, and display the reasons that pushed postfeminists to take part in this culture. Furthermore, this paper tries to highlight the link that exists between Consumer Culture and Popular Culture in order to analyze the portrayals of women and postfeminists in Popular Culture's different forms along with depicting the different reactions of the patriarchal society and other feminist groups towards postfeminism. Eventually, this dissertation will demonstrate that those reactions are mere misunderstandings and preconceived thoughts about postfeminism, and the issues that the latter is witnessing, are part of their continuous struggle for recognition.

Résumé

Dans la conjoncture actuelle, le monde féminin estime que cette nouvelle tendance est la plus méritoire car elle a généré des débats le plus souvent controversés néanmoins fructueux. Les adeptes de cette mouvance innovatrice soutiennent essentiellement et sans restriction la culture de consommation qu'ils jugent pouvant renforcer la lutte pour l'égalité entre la femme et l'homme; à cette fin afin d'éviter tout rejet de la part des plus récalcitrants les différentes interprétations et éclaircissements nécessaires sont exposés. Il faut souligner que l'idée de la culture de consommation était, chez les prédécesseurs féministes, un facteur non recevable. Dans l'optique évoquée, ces travaux de recherche élucideront la réaction qui existe entre la culture de consommation et la culture populaire. La situation de la femme ne sera que plus claire dans les deux cas ainsi que les différentes réactions préjudiciables pour la femme contemporaine, émanant d'hommes hostiles voir de mouvement féministes porteurs d'idées le plus souvent stéréotypées.

تعتبر هذه النسخة من الحركة النسوية من أهم المواضيع وأكثرها جدلا بحيث أن هذه الحركة و مع أول ظهور لها أحدثت ضجة كبيرة مما أدى إلى خلق ارتباكات و تساؤلات في عقول الشعب الأمريكي. يرجع سبب هذه التساؤلات بالشكل الرئيسي إلى تبني الاعضاء التابعين لهذه النسخة لفكرة دمج ثقافة الاستهلاك في مساهم النضالي لتحقيق المساواة بين الـ لأن ثقافة الاستهلاك لم تكن بالشيء المرغوب فيه عند النسويات في القديم. لهذا السبب هذه الأطروحة سوف تقوم بشرح بعض المفاهيم المهمة توضيح وُجهات نظر النسويات في القديم حول مفهوم ثقافة الاستهلاك و مقارنتهم مع وُجهات نظر النسويات التابعين للنسخة الجديدة من الحركة النسوية. و في هذا السياق هذا البحث سيسلط الضوء على العلاقة التي تكمن بين الثقافتين الاستهلاكية و الشعبية تحليل الصور و الطرق المتبعة لإظهار المرأة في مختلف أشكال الثقافة الشعبية هذا البحث سيبرز أهم ردود الأفعال السلبية الصادرة من مجموعات نسوية أخرى و كذا من المجتمع الذكوري في حق هذه النسخة من الحرك النسوية. و بالتالي هذه الأطروحة ستستنتج أن هذه الردود هي عبارة عن أفكار نمطية مروجة ضد المرأة و ضد النسخة الجديدة بشكل عام.

Table of Contents

Dedication	i
Acknowledgements	ii
Abstract	iii
Résumé	v
.....	vi
Table of Contents	vii
General Introduction	1
Chapter I Background to Feminism and Consumerism.....	5
Introduction	6
I.1. Definition of Feminism	6
I.1.1. First-Wave Feminism.....	8
I.1.2. Second-Wave Feminism	8
I.1.2.1. Branches and Strands of Second-Wave Feminism.....	10
I.1.2.1.1. The Liberal Feminism.....	11
I.1.2.1.2. The Marxist and SocialistFeminism.....	11
I.1.2.1.3. The Radical Feminism.....	12
I.1.3. Third-Wave Feminism.....	13
I.1.4. Definition of Postfeminsm.....	14
I. 2. Definition of Consumer Culture	17
I.3. The Relationship Between Feminism and Consumer Culture ...20	
Conclusion	24
Chapter II Early Feminists’ Consumer Acitivism.....	25
Introduction	26
II.1. Early Feminists’ Activism, Femininity and Consumerism	26
II.1.1. First-Wave Suffragettes and Anti-Consumerism.....	26
II.1.2. Second-Wave Feminism: Femininity and Consumerism as a Patriarchal System.....	30
II.1.3. Third-Wave Feminism: Glorifying the Marketplace.....	33

Conclusion	39
Chapter III The Reactions against Postfeminism.....	40
Introduction	41
III.1.Postfeminism and American Popular Culture	41
III.1.1. Definition of Popular Culture.....	41
III.1.2. The Representation of Postfeminism in American Popular Culture.....	43
III.1.2. Patriarchal Society’s Reaction towards Postfeminism	48
III.1.3. The Reaction of Other Feminist Groups towards Postfeminism	50
Conclusion	55
General Conclusion	57
Bibliography	60

General Introduction

General Introduction

It is undeniable that women have come long way in the American society from gaining the right to vote in 1920 to holding good and honorable positions in all the spheres and domains even in politics. However, despite these accomplishments women's struggle for recognition and equality is far from being over. In fact at the turn of the 21st century, many confusions and contradictions arose in understanding postfeminism. The latter remains the concept that changed radically the traditional streams and views of feminism. It becomes evident that women of the 1990s can have it all, and that feminism for the most part has reached its main goal which is the equality of opportunity with men. This idea of having it all came from postfeminists' integration in the Consumer Culture. Consumerism for them has become a fundamental belief and a major source behind women's empowerment at all levels. However, first and second-wave feminists used to have different perspectives concerning women and consumerism.

Therefore, the aim of our dissertation is to analyze how postfeminist identity is constructed through consumerism. It is worth noting that most of the problems that postfeminists are witnessing occurred because they have adopted consumerism and prompted women to take part in it.

Postfeminist agenda represents a new face to feminism that people are not familiar with either in its new ideas, new interests, and even its new images. Postfeminists came in totally new shapes and new characters that are unlike their predecessors. This novelty was the driving force behind our proposed research, in order to discover more this particular version of feminism and to analyze deeply its specifics. This particular field of study has always been the center of our interests

General Introduction

and the center of our motivation in order to make further studies about it and to disclosure its hidden aspects.

Central to this study is the question of whether the negative representations of postfeminism are in their right path, or are mere stereotypes and misunderstandings to vilify the reputation of this version of feminism. What is postfeminism? What are its main promoted beliefs, ideas and principles? To what extent postfeminists are different from early feminists? What is Consumer Culture, and what is its relation to Popular Culture? How is the construction of postfeminist identity linked to consumerism? What were early feminists' critiques of consumerism? And eventually how did patriarchal society, Popular Culture and other feminist groups react to postfeminists' unconventional thoughts? These crucial research questions are to be answered in our research paper for the purpose of meeting the goals of this study.

People tend to reject postfeminism for its unprecedented thoughts that once were forbidden. Therefore, it is hypothesized that after providing adequate answers to the previous research questions, this dissertation may decipher the ambiguity that surrounds this contemporary version of feminism.

Many scholars and researchers have discussed, analyzed, and dealt with the status of postfeminism in the United States. Katie Milestone and Anneke Meyer's *Gender and Popular Culture*, and Marian Meyes's *Women in Popular Culture: Representation and Meaning (Political Communication)* take a look at a wide range of contemporary images of women within the media to examine the representations of women in Popular Culture and how it shaped gender identities in the American society. Those researchers demonstrate that such portrayals are mainly stereotypes

General Introduction

being brought about by different Popular Culture forms which are shaped by two major trends: the mainstreaming and stereotypical representations that underscore women bodies as permissive spectacle, in addition to the commodification of those images for a global market. Another book entitled *Feminism: Reinventing the Fword*, written by Nadia Abushanab Higgins, attempts to invite women to reexplore the history of US feminism. Throughout the book, Higgins tends to emphasize on the efforts of modern feminists; the core of this focus is to shed the light on the role of these feminists who are striving to empower women at work, government, and even in cultural and personal arenas. Hence, our proposed research will attempt to tackle other dimensions in this subject area. From the previous studies, it can be understood that they analyzed the representation of women and feminism in Popular Culture in general, without speaking about the reasons behind such stance against women and postfeminism. Therefore, we will try to analyze the representation of postfeminism in the American consumer culture because consumerism is considered as the sparkle that led the American public start questioning the value of postfeminism and its relevance. Eventually, we will attempt to provide a set of reliable facts in order to support the main ideas and concepts of our research.

The approach to be used in our paper is a qualitative one. Therefore, in the ongoing process and while conducting our research, we will rely on some particular tools to help us meet the goals of this study. This dissertation will mainly adopt particular research methods that go hand in hand with the structure of its chapters. Our research papers is composed upon three significant chapters; in the first chapter we will employ analytical method to detect the relationships that exist between postfeminism and Consumer Culture besides to the latter's relation in the construction of postfeminist identity, in addition to providing some key definitions to

General Introduction

the topic's main concepts. Subsequently, the second chapter will adopt a comparative method for the purpose of comparing early feminists' views towards consumerism and postfeminists' thoughts towards the integration of women in Consumer Culture. Finally, the third chapter will employ a deductive method in which we will display the negative reactions towards postfeminism and deduce whether these reactions are in their right path or are mere misunderstandings.

CHAPTER ONE

Background to Feminism and Consumerism

Introduction

Throughout history early feminists of both first and second-waves were skeptical towards consumerism especially when it comes to the integration of women in the domain, yet postfeminists possess a very different point of view. The present chapter is an attempt to provide a theoretical background on the link that exists between postfeminism and consumer culture. It will be divided into three sections, and each section will deal with a specific notion in details. The first one will attempt to define feminism along with its three historical waves, depending on some key prominent scholars and researchers. Subsequently, the first section will also define the term postfeminism and its specificities. Furthermore, in the second section, we will provide adequate explanation to the term consumer culture, and will demonstrate its different significances outside the conventional interpretation. Finally, the third and last section will display or detect the type of the relationship that exists between feminism and consumer culture. In this section we will attempt to go back to early feminist waves, the first and second-wave, besides to the contemporary wave: postfeminism.

I.1. Definition of Feminism

Correa Walsh states that people have come a long way since the inception of feminism. Every individual seems to have different answers, and every answer is fueled with a political and emotional charge (3). For many people inside and outside the academy, the word feminism continues to cause controversy and to arise a visceral response, as Rosalind Delmar argues in her book *What is Feminism? In Theorizing Feminism* that feminism has become a very difficult term to be understood especially “in its diversity and in its differences and in its specificity” (7).

Chapter One: Background to Feminism and Consumerism

Feminism cannot be seen as one unitary concept, yet a diverse and multi-faceted grouping of ideas, and actions (11). According to Delmar, many scholars have attempted to give an adequate answer to “what is feminism?”, yet the task of reaching a consensus on what the term encompasses seems impossible since the many different strands of feminism seem to be either divergent or even opposed to one another (20). Any attempt to provide a baseline definition of the common basis of all feminisms may start with the assertion that feminisms concern themselves with women’s inferior position in the society, along with the discrimination encountering women because of their sex (Walsh 5). Furthermore, all feminists tend to call for changes in the social, economic, political, or cultural order, for the purpose of reducing and overcoming the discrimination against women (6).

There is still a debate over when and where the term feminism was first used; however, the social scientist Jane Freedman asserts that the term was first used in 1871 in a French medical text in order to describe the end of sexual organs development of male patients (17). The latter were perceived as suffering from “feminization” of their bodies (ibid). Afterward, the term feminist was coined by Alexander Dumas fils, a French writer, and anti-feminist, who used this term in a pamphlet which was published in 1872 entitled *L’Homme-Femme*¹ (Freedman 316) in order to describe women as behaving in a supposedly masculine way. Therefore, as she notices, despite the use of the term feminism in medical context to mean a feminization of men, it became synonymous to “a virilization” of women, in political terms (ibid).

As far as women’s struggle for their rights is concerned Mary Wollstonecraft, the English writer and the advocate of women’s rights, responds in

¹ Alexandre Dumas Fils. *L’Homme Femme : Réponse A M. Henri D’Ideville* (Paris : Michel Lévy Frères, 1872) 156, qtd.in Freedman 316.

Chapter One: Background to Feminism and Consumerism

her book *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792) to those educational theorists who did not believe that women should have education; and concludes that women should not be viewed as a property because they are human beings deserving the same fundamental rights and opportunities as men (7).

In the same line of thought, Sally Scholz argues that the history of feminism as a movement in the United States began in the 1840s when many movements calling for women's rights, started to appear along with the Seneca Falls Convention² in 1848, New York, as well as the Declaration of Sentiments³. The latter played a major role in asserting women's equal cultural, legal and political rights, and fundamentally the suffrage rights (29). This movement gave rise to the National Women Suffrage Association⁴. Among its founders were Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton. It is worth noting that even before the appearance of such movements calling for women's rights, women were writing about the oppressions and the inequalities that already existed in their social environments (30).

Delmar states that the term feminism had appeared a long time after women began calling for an improvement of their social status after questioning their subordinate conditions (24). Despite the fact that a considerable number of organizations was fighting for women's rights and equality, they did not attempt to name themselves feminists; the term feminism itself used to possess a restrictive

² The Seneca Falls Convention was the first women's rights convention to discuss the social, civil, and religious conditions and rights of women. It was held in Seneca Falls New York, and spanned two days over July 19-20 1848. For more details, see history.com Seneca Falls Convention.

³ The Declaration of Sentiments, also known as the Declaration of Rights and Sentiments, is a document signed in 1848 by 68 women and 32 men at the first women's rights convention to be organized by women. This document emerged from the Seneca Falls Convention which outlined the rights that American women should be entitled to as citizens. For more details, see Encyclopedia Britannica.com Declaration of sentiments.

⁴ The National Women Suffrage Association was formed on May 15th, 1869 in New York City. It was created as a response to the split that took place in the American Equal Rights Association over whether the woman's movement should support the Fifteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution. For more details, see [Britannica.com/national women suffrage association](http://Britannica.com/national-women-suffrage-association).

usage either in terms of its different interests or bodies (25). Social scientists have divided feminism into three historical waves:

I.1.1. First-Wave Feminism

As an attempt to provide a set of classifications, as far as American feminism is concerned, history of feminism had determined that this movement appeared at different moments as a chain of waves. The metaphor of waves is often used to explain the history of feminism (Scholz 31). Rosemarie Tong argues that the first-wave is used to refer to the period between the late 19th century and early 20th century; the feminist movements which appeared in this wave have mainly concentrated on gaining the right to vote for all women, which was eventually achieved in 1920 after the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment⁵ (21). Besides she states that after women gained the right to vote, many people advocating the extension of suffrage to all women, adopted the idea that women's victory meant that "women had indeed become men's equal" (23).

I.1.2. Second-Wave Feminism

The second-wave; however, has broadened the debate to a wide range of issues to include areas such as official legal inequalities, family problems, sexuality issues, workplace troubles, etc. (Baxandall and Gordon 414). This wave usually refers to a period of feminist activities that first began in the late 1960s (ibid). In this period of time, the administration of President Kennedy had played a fundamental role in making women's rights a crucial focus of the New Frontier⁶, in addition to his

⁵ The Nineteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution was ratified August 18th, 1920. This amendment granted for American women the right to vote after 70-year battle. For more details, see history.com/women's-history/19th-amendment.

⁶The New Frontier was a term used by the president candidate John F. Kennedy in his acceptance speech in the 1960 United States elections at the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum as his slogan to inspire the American public to support him. For more details, see ushistory.org/56b. Kennedy's New Frontier.

Chapter One: Background to Feminism and Consumerism

establishment of a Presidential Commission on the Status of Women⁷ which had been presided by Eleanor Roosevelt and comprising cabinet officials (415).

Prior to the beginning of second-wave feminism, the French writer Simone De Beauvoir argued in her book *The Second Sex* (1953) that women in the patriarchal society have been perceived as other (741). She attempted to deal with the treatment of women throughout history in which she discusses several instances of women being oppressed, from early nomadic societies until 1947 when France has granted the right to vote (ibid). Besides, she sought to assess women's historical and biological circumstances which have been denied and admitted that men have been able to maintain the dominant roles respectively in all cultures because women have accepted their assigned subordinate status (763). Eventually, she concluded her book stating that since women are naturally and biologically able of getting pregnant, lactating and menstruating, is not a valid reason for classifying women as the second sex (775); she also argued that man while considering himself as the essential being, he has treated woman as an object and an unessential being (ibid).

Accordingly, Betty Friedan, in her book *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), argued that placing women at home intended to limit their abilities, and wrote, "The women who grow up wanting to be just a housewife, are in a much danger as the millions who walked to their own deaths in the concentration camps" (25), in this quotation she offered evidence of women suppressed by the misery of the occupation as a housewife (ibid). She referred to the cultural myth that women sought security

⁷ The Presidential Commission on the Status of Women was an advisory commission which was created by the president John F. Kennedy December 14th, 1961 to advise him on issues concerning the status of women. For more details, see university of Rhode Island President's Commission on the Status of Women: uri.edu/pcsow.

and fulfillment in domestic life and that their feminine behavior served to discourage women from entering employment, politics, and even the public life in general (27).

Moreover, according to Baxandall and Gordon, second-wave feminism ended in the early 1980s in the United States along with disputes over issues related to sexuality and pornography, which led to the rise of third-wave feminism in the early 1990s⁸ (429). However, both Baxandall and Gordon write,

Judicial and legislative victories have been considerable, but also vulnerable to attack and erosion. These gains include the legalization of abortion in 1973, federal guidelines against coercive sterilization, rape shield laws which encourage more women to prosecute their attackers, affirmative action programs which aim to correct past discrimination, parental leave albeit unpaid. Feminism was one of the forces behind federal and state hate crime laws and domestic partnership laws. The Violence Against Women Act of 1994 created an unprecedented federal government bureau devoted to combating violence against women. (430)

Both scholars argue that despite the issues and the disputes that feminism was witnessing, feminists actually did achieve considerable rights regarding equal access to education and to jobs (ibid). Scholars have divided the prominent groups that appeared during the period of the second-wave into three main branches:

I.1.2.1.Branches and Strands of Second-Wave Feminism

Judith Lorber denotes that the second-wave was constructed upon three groups: The Liberal feminism, the Marxist and Socialist feminism, and Radical feminism (9).

⁸ During the period of early 1980s to the 1990s there were debates within feminists related to sexuality; these debates were known as feminist sex wars, also known as the lesbian sex wars, or the sex wars. These terms were used to refer collective debates that took place amongst feminists regarding issues of sexuality and sexual activity. For more details, see the journal article of Sex War: The Debate between Radical and Libertarian Feminists Volume. 10, No. 1 (1984) pages, 106-112, by Ann Ferguson, extracted from the University of Chicago Press Journals.

1.1.2.1.1. The Liberal Feminism

According to Judith Lorber, the main aim of liberal feminism in the United States is to call for the equal rights for women arguing that those rights along with the privileges, which the state confesses, must extend to all women (9). Liberal Feminists focus on fighting against gender discrimination “such as job markets and inequitable wage scales and with getting women into positions of authority in the professions, government and cultural institutions” (ibid). Subsequently, Liberal feminism succeeds in empowering women as well as making them able to occupy jobs which were formerly male-dominated professions such as business, law and politics (10). Furthermore, Lorber attempts to remind the readers with a significant contribution provided by this feminist group that “it was somewhat more successful in proving that even if women are different from men, they are not inferior” (ibid).

1.1.2.1.2. The Marxist and Socialist Feminism

As far as Marxist and socialist feminism are concerned, Lorber argues that women’s wages and properties in the 19th century were meant to be owned in the name of their husbands, in other words, women did not have the right to possess a property in their own name⁹ (11). This analysis of the social structure of capitalism was brought by Marx who did not take into account the housewives of those workers (ibid). However, by the coming of Marxist and Socialist Feminism, women were eventually put into this structure of capitalism (12). Judith Lorber maintains that this

⁹ Marxist Feminists were feminists who allied themselves with the philosophical and economic theories that of Karl Marx. The influential work of Karl Marx and Frederick Engels (1848) in The Communist Manifesto, and Marx (1859) in A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy laid the foundation of early discourses about the relationship between capitalism and oppression. Marx argues that these systems are set by the ruling class in accordance to their needs in order to remain in power, and shows how the working class is exploited for profit of capitalists who tend to pay the workers poor wages in comparison to what they produce. Besides, Engels published The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State (1884), in which he argues that a woman’s subordination is not as a result of her biological nature but of social relations, and that men’s efforts to achieve their control over women’s labor and sexual faculties become institutionalized in the nuclear family. For more details, see feministezine.com Intro to Marxist Feminism.

feminist group considers the family to be a burden and the source from which women receive oppression and exploitation (ibid). In other words, if a woman works outside home, she is expected to accomplish her family duties as well; and eventually she finishes up with working twice “as hard as” a man with poor wages (13). Therefore, as a solution to women’s economic dependency on men, social feminists seek to apply comparable worth programs for the purpose of comparing the traditional women’s jobs “such as secretary” with men’s traditional jobs while taking into account and giving values to the skills used, and the qualifications which are needed. This method makes salaries equalized for occupations (ibid).

1.1.2.1.3. The Radical Feminism

Radical feminism; however, is the breeding ground of several ideas which are arising from feminism (Lorber 13). This branch of feminists reached its peak from approximately 1967 to 1975¹⁰; however, it becomes no longer universally accepted as it used to be, since it becomes no longer serving just to define the concept of feminism (ibid). Radical feminism intended to achieve changes basically the ones that hold within revolutionary proportions (14). Besides, this group focused on building a sort of a boundary between the behaviors which are biologically-determined and those which are culturally-determined, for the purpose of making both men and women able to free their minds from their preconceived ideas about gender roles (ibid).

¹⁰ Radical Feminism in the United States was developed as a component of the women’s liberation movement which grew largely due to the civil rights movement that gained momentum in the 1960s, and several women who took up the cause of radical feminism had already previous experiences in the struggle against racism. For more details, see *the Journal Article of Radical Feminism and Feminist Radicalism (1984)* by Ellen Willis, No, 9/10, pages 91-118, published by Duke University Press.

I.1.3. Third-Wave Feminism

According to Amanda D. Lotz, third-wave feminism arose as a reaction to the noted backlash against the movements that appeared during the period of second-wave feminism in the 1960s to the 1980s (3). She argued that women such as Rebecca Walker¹¹, Naomi Wolf¹², and Christina Hoff Sommers¹³, who wrote books clarifying the diverse shortcomings of second-wave feminism, continued naming themselves as feminists (ibid). Rebecca Walker is considered and seen as a living symbol of the way that the previous wave ‘second-wave feminism has failed during history to assimilate young, non-white women (4). Therefore, third-wave feminism intends to empower women in all spheres and to make further changes in media portrayals of men to make them equal to women or even superior (ibid).

Therefore, Garrison adds that Rebecca Walker’s 1992 essay “Becoming the Third-Wave”, intended to write attacks on second-wave feminism for victimizing women rather than empowering them in several spheres and domains (196). Besides, she admits that third-wave ideology did not attempt to consider the shortcomings and criticisms of second-wave as its core components, but rather as a reactionary means to draw the attention of the media (ibid).

¹¹ Rebecca Walker is an American writer and activist. In 1997, she wrote her book To Be Real: Telling the Truth and Changing the Face of Feminism; in which she aimed at reevaluating the feminist movement of the time and highlighting the main failures of second-wave feminism. For more details, see rebeccawalker.com/work/to-be-real.

¹² Naomi Wolf is an American author and journalist; she wrote in 1991 her first book The Beauty Myth, in which she criticized fashion and beauty industries for exploiting women. Besides, she attempts in her book to position her argument against the concerns of second-wave feminism by focusing on particular shortcomings committed by this wave. For more details, see naomiwolf.org

¹³ Christina Hoff Sommers is an American author, and former philosophy professor. She wrote, in 1994 Who Stole Feminism? How Women Have Betrayed Women, in which she argues that there is a split within feminism in what she calls gender feminism. For more details, see revleft.com/archive.

I.1.4. Definition of Postfeminism

Postfeminism¹⁴ is considered as one of the trajectories of third-wave feminist ideology (Garrison 4). However, in Susan Faludi's *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against Women* (1992), the term postfeminism is used as being a sentiment which holds within a sense of indifference towards feminism; she claims that postfeminist attitudes are not oriented towards achieving objectives which is a notion asserted by popular culture (95). As a reaction to Faludi's interpretation, other feminist writers such as Joanne Hollows, who criticizes her, comments that she tends to identify postfeminism as being anti-feminism and against all what early feminists did believe in (92).

Moreover, Angela McRobbie suggests that the year of 1990 marks the turning point in the history of feminist activism, meanwhile, second-wave feminism is criticized for disregarding and not taking into account the notion of race (256). According to Ann Brooks, many scholars developed a theory that contradicts the common negative use of the term postfeminism in the United States, stating that it attempts to interrogate in a critical way the existing feminist theory for the purpose of refining rather than vilifying the former feminist work (ibid). She writes,

Postfeminism, as an expression of a stage in the constant evolutionary movement of feminism, has gained greater currency in recent years. Once seen, somewhat crudely, as 'anti-feminist', the term is now understood as a useful conceptual frame of reference encompassing the intersection of feminism with a number of other anti-foundationalist movements including postmodernism, post-structuralism and post-colonialism.(1)

¹⁴ Throughout this research, we will attempt to use the word postfeminism as a single word. The reason behind this decision is that the researchers and the scholars who tend to denote that postfeminism is not part of feminism and that it came only after feminism has finished, used to write it with a hyphen to separate the word and became post-feminism. Among those researchers is Angela McRobbie. For more details, see Post-Feminism and Popular Culture Article in Feminist Media Studies, 2004.

Chapter One: Background to Feminism and Consumerism

Ann Brooks's definition provides a renewal of postfeminism which is beneficial for understanding several developments that occur within United States television series. Besides, she denotes that postfeminism emerged in a time when first and second-wave feminism contemplated in an insufficient way the issue of sexual difference. Brooks attempts to focus on the overlapping of feminist thinking with post-structuralism, post-modernism and post-colonialism (1-8).

Therefore postfeminism has become one of the most essential, and conflicting concepts in feminist cultural and media studies, as a result of its widely different interpretations provided by many scholars (McRobbie, 255). Ann Brooks has referred to this term as being "about feminism today" and not against feminism; therefore postfeminism needs to be located in the context of contemporary neo-liberal, and late-capitalist society which is distinguished by consumer culture and individualism, with a little concern to activism and institutional politics (5). Postfeminism is considered to be a contemporary and a new way to empower women and make them more independent, more individual in decision-making, being exposed to more sexual pleasures and fashion, and becoming more interested in consumer culture in addition to their celebration of the body which has become the fundamental focus for postfeminists (6).

According to Fien Adriaens's *Postfeminism in Popular Culture: A Potential for Critical Resistance* (2009), postfeminism has become an essential and a conflicting concept among the notions used in "feminist cultural and media studies" (1). She argues that postfeminism is placed in the academic context of cultural studies and television within consumer culture (2).

Chapter One: Background to Feminism and Consumerism

Besides Ann Brooks believes that popular culture and media discourses became the main forms behind the portrayals “of this new feminism” which modified the real meaning and the main principles of postfeminism (6).

As far as postfeminism is concerned, Gamble denotes that it is a sort of critique on what is called second-wave feminism’s binary thinking and essentialism (43). In other words, Stephanie Genz observes that when focusing on equality and the basic similarity between sexes, second-wave feminists employ a binary thinking such as woman/man, straight/gay, and suggests a united and a fixed identity of woman (44). Postfeminism; however, as indicated by Featherstone, provides a critique to such categorizations, where the focus is on “difference”, multiple identities, and anti-essentialism. Postfeminists call every woman to recognize her own personal mix of identities, which contradicts the universal identity that was adopted by feminists previously (52).

Thus, postfeminism tends to celebrate sexual pleasure, subjectification, freedom, and personal choice (Gill 140). This appears to be very prominent in popular discourses as a noted sexualisation of culture arising (ibid). This refers to discourses about sex and sexuality, especially in the erotic representations of women’s and girls’ bodies in all media forms and in public spheres (150). It is worth noting that this pro-sexual pleasure stance of postfeminism is used as a tool against second-wave feminists who used to stand for a negative vision on sexual encounters for women since they are dangerous, resulting in a sexual objectification of women, in addition to the sexual diseases which may transfer to women bodies (151).

Another significant point is the way that postfeminist culture actually redefines feminism; this point is explained by both Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra, in their article, “In focus: Postfeminism and Contemporary Media Studies”, they

Chapter One: Background to Feminism and Consumerism

state that postfeminist culture attempts to redefine feminism through its class exclusions, in other words most commentators envision postfeminism as a white backlash that denies class, and ignores older age (22). According to them, postfeminist culture accomplishes this by “centralizing an affluent elite,” by “elevating consumption as a strategy for healing those dissatisfactions that might alternatively be understood in terms of social illnesses and discontents,” and by “confusing self-interest with individuality.”(24).

Angela McRobbie concludes that the postfeminist approach which is related to individual choice and power has its limitations (263). More specifically, when “agency” is restricted to physical appearance and superficial consumer choices, women are constrained to boundaries that are defined by outside power structures (264).

I.2. Definition of Consumer Culture

Consumer culture is a system which is dominated by the act of consuming products and commodities (Goodman and Cohen 1). Consumption is central to every society, it is considered as a very fundamental part of the construction of a set of concepts and values which help people distinguish and understand their situation in the society (ibid). Consumption tends to dominate and structure people’s everyday lives and practices, in which the meanings and the significance of what people tend to consume becomes a very essential aspect in both social and personal experiences (2). Besides, consumption tends to be about the meaning for those purchased products which are eventually consumed for their associations and significances. Since consumption serves as an indicator that people are actually living in a consumer culture, the latter turns to be a way of life that works not only for the

Chapter One: Background to Feminism and Consumerism

satisfaction of people's needs and desires, but also for the redefinition of those needs and expansion of people's desires (3-5).

Furthermore, the culture of consumption is related to the modern world as Grant McCracken points in his *Culture and Consumption* (1990). Besides, consumer culture is correlated with the idea of modernity in which tradition is no more governing and controlling the world, but rather it is the continuous change which does that (6). Furthermore, Featherstone argues that consumer culture is based upon the idea of the "expansion of capitalist commodity production" (13). He also points out that commodity functions as a sign, and this function led Jameson in 1981 to write that culture is "the very element of consumer society itself; no society has even been saturated with signs and images like today's societies." (131). The term consumer culture also refers to the cultures in which mass consumption and production tend to empower the economy of the country along with forming a set of values, desires, and providing set of constructions to the personal identity (Featherstone 14).

In addition, early English consumer culture of 1770s was considered as a wide spread culture of consumption that appeared at that time when commodity consumption grew after the Revolutionary War. After the civil war and following the explosive growth of industrialization in the late 18th and early 19th century, consumer culture began assuming its modern shape (Magandda 10). Some Americans, such as the cultural critic Thorstein Veblen in 1899, resisted consumerism in what he called "conspicuous consumption" of luxury goods and products condemning the extravagant consuming patterns, yet most Americans from the middle class took consumerism simply for granted (16). Furthermore, by the 1920s most promotional works moved to advertising agencies as a result of merchandisers' promoting to

Chapter One: Background to Feminism and Consumerism

several brand names for the purpose of doing some marketing to their products and eventually distributing their commodities (ibid). Those advertising agencies succeeded to be cultural referees of style and taste as a result of using attractive graphics for the purpose of associating a set of social values and some desirable personal characteristics and attitudes to particular brand name products and goods (17). By the 1950s with the spread of economic prosperity, national advertising campaigns, shopping centers and malls, in addition to the advent of television, American people witnessed a set of shared and common references (26).

In this vein, Don Slater argues that consumer culture began with a significant penetration of consumer goods and products into people's everyday lives upon different social layers (10). Subsequently, consumption was filled out of a new sense of fashion and taste, and culture was fueled and empowered by the advances of the infrastructures, organizations, and practices which took advantage of the newly constructed markets, in other words, the culture of consumption took advantage from the rise of shopping, advertising, and marketing (ibid). Consumer culture attempts to indicate a social order in which relations existing between the symbolic and material funds, "are mediated through markets" (869).

The main features of this consumer culture is the growth of a materialistic attitude, a tendency to develop forms of social competition through goods, and also an increase in the meaningfulness of these goods to express identity and social belonging (Slater 8). This culture of consumption which is based on the process of social stratification emerged as an influential force, sustaining the formation of modernity, the development of trade and mercantilism, and the adoption of the monetary economy. In other words, it has accompanied the entire rise of capitalism (ibid).

Chapter One: Background to Feminism and Consumerism

Under the disguise of commerce and trade, individuals came to contact with a new ideology of free exchange, not only of goods and services, but of ideas, opinions, and meanings as well (Staler 51). Consumer culture, according to him, is not a reference to a recent phenomenon: it is rather part of a new terminology that came to replace the notion of civil society, which itself is born to modernity (53).

Stuart Ewen tackles a very crucial point concerning the notion of consumerism and its relation to popular culture (62). He states that all people are consumers of popular culture, since the latter is consumerist by nature through its most common categories (63). He divided those categories into: entertainment such as movies, TV shows, music, sports, politics, fashion/clothes, and technology (ibid). Consumerism, as he notes, is part of popular culture because through the media such as television commercials, films, music videos, and others, it attempts to popularize brands, products, ideas, images, and perspectives to the public (66). Popular culture encourages the spread of consumerism via different media outlets for the purpose of reaching and influencing a wider audience (69).

I.3. The Relationship Between Feminism and Consumer Culture

By the advent of television and popular culture forms, discourses about women's relation to consumption appeared, linking this relation to the concept of feminism and the feminist identity (Groeneveld 2). Elizabeth Groeneveld argues, in her article "Be a Feminist or Just Dress Like One: Bust Fashion and Feminism as Lifestyle" (2008), that feminism itself as a movement has gone through significant changes since the emergence of second-wave feminism. At that time feminism was still a movement encompassing traditional shapes of political organizations involving marches, demonstrations, etc. (179). However, feminism or postfeminism now becomes a media event, and no more about writing for the public or even about

Chapter One: Background to Feminism and Consumerism

lobbying MPs¹⁵ to achieve significant rights. Postfeminism's tools today are above all those traditional forms; it becomes virtual, actual, and mainly about spectacle (ibid). Postfeminists today restored the notion of spectacle along with its importance which is the permanent relation between feminism and fashion. Historically speaking, by the 19th century, women were criticized for wearing fashionable dresses for the purpose of tempting men into sinful desires through promoting their sexual attractiveness (180). This perspective was adopted by feminists earlier because they saw that dressing in such a manner would definitely move male lust, and eventually objectifying female bodies (180). Feminists at that time made women grasp the idea that they could only gain their social independence by means of halting representing themselves as sexual beings because the message of feminism is bigger and beyond body spectacles (ibid).

Those principles; however, changed by the 20th century. The concept of attractive women has become increasingly demanding and even necessary (Groeneveld 183). Besides, women are expected to enhance their beauty for the purpose of attracting men's attention which is actually a leading reason for women's oppression (ibid). Groeneveld suggests that this idea and this behavior must be rejected and that the use of fashion by this way is an offender since it objectifies women by showing them as hypersexualised women (ibid). She also tackles the idea of capitalism and its way of combining everything such as personal deviation, and aesthetic way which are used as means to protest, under the lifestyle umbrella; therefore, capitalism seeks to pleasure (184). When brand names and top designers include feminism in their spectacle of the catwalk as images and instances to free women and show their struggle, this shows the state that feminism has reached today

¹⁵ MP is an abbreviation that stands for different meaning; however, in the political sphere it means Members of Parliament, a legislative body. For more details, see allacronyms.com.

Chapter One: Background to Feminism and Consumerism

(ibid). This movement ceased to be a political movement holding a message and fighting for it, to becoming another spectacle (ibid).

Subsequently, Michelle Goldberg argues in her article “Feminism for Sale” (2011), that feminism is witnessing an ideology crisis (1). Zeisler, in the world of marketplace feminism, writes “the fight for gender equality has transmogrified from a collective goal to a consumer brand” in which “purchasing itself is a feminist act” (29). She also argues that we are in a world where freedom becomes measured with what people consume, wear, watch and purchase, this becomes more significant than what people tend to organize and fight for (ibid). Feminism becomes a product and commodity-like to be purchased and an identity to be advertised rather than a social movement that works for the purpose of changing the structure of several issues in the society (35). Besides, Zeisler emphasizes that problems such as abortion restriction bills, wage gap, in addition to the growing number of women in the prison which is considered to be the fastest-growing part in the prison population, will not be solved by market feminism since those issues require a collective serious political action (59).

Throughout her book, Zeisler attempts to turn people’s attention back to systems, because consumer culture is obsessed with individuals, bodies, and celebrities (111). This obsession diminishes feminism down to carrying about superficial and unnecessary aspects related to commodities, fashion, and products, this put feminism in another set of restrictions on what women can do (ibid). Therefore, Ginia Bellafante states “Feminism is dead! In the 70’s, feminism produced a popular culture that was intellectually provocative. Today it’s a whole lot of stylish fluff. Fashion spectacle, paparazzi jammed galas, mindless sex-talk, is this what the road map to greater female empowerment has become?” (56).

Chapter One: Background to Feminism and Consumerism

In the quotation above Ginia Bellafante argues that feminism has transformed and changed from collective and effective political movement to a superficial personal way of consumption (88). Along with this perspective Richardson states that postfeminism originates from the media for the purpose of increasing sales by making use of women (ibid).

In fact, postfeminism shares the discourses and the principles of capitalism, neoliberalism, and consumer culture in which women are required to pay attention to their private and consumer lives as means of self-expression (Genz 335). Hence, postfeminism is the discourse and the space that allows women to be feminine, attractive, independent, individual in choice-making, more into fashion, consumer culture, and sexual pleasure; it contradicts what early feminists called for and believed in (337).

Moreover, both Joanne Hollows and Rachel Moseley assert that consumer culture is a fundamental aspect in postfeminist tradition because consuming is considered as a means by which women achieve pleasure (14). They attempt to construct their identity and meet their societal appreciation via consuming; therefore, consumption cannot be restricted to the act of purchasing. Subsequently the over emphasis on consumption has always been criticized by early feminists, because for them women will become victims of commodification (ibid).

Among those early feminists were second-wave feminists, who were charged by works such as Simone De Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949), and Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), attacked marketing activities and advertising industry images of women, for portraying them as decorative objects, as well as for perpetrating negative stereotypes of women which made them appear as good consumers being enslaved to consumerism (Craig 27).

Conclusion

It can be understood that feminism is a multi-faceted and a difficult term to be grasped and understood. This concept has appeared throughout history as a chain of waves in which women have struggled to gain recognition and equal rights. However, it was until the late 20th that feminism's conditions have changed radically. By the emergence of third-wave feminism along with postfeminism that many confusions and contradictions appeared. The chapter concludes that postfeminism passes in a very different direction which focuses on consumerism and spectacle. Therefore the second chapter will deeply describe and analyze early feminist consumer activism and the reasons behind their scepticism towards the integration of women in the domain of consumer culture.

Chapter Two

Early Feminists' Consumer Activism

Introduction

Femininity and Consumerism are two crucial related notions that have been heavily discussed during the history of feminism. In fact, many feminists have dealt with the influence of consumerism on society in general. The present chapter endeavors to highlight the reaction of first and second-wave feminists who used to be more skeptical about consumerism and feminine attitude as part of male dominance on women's body. However, third-wave feminists encouraged the use of consumer culture as a form of emancipation and liberation. Therefore, this chapter tends to clarify the three feminist waves' points of view which are supported by reliable arguments for the sake of a better understanding.

II.1. Early Feminists' Activism, Femininity and Consumerism

II.1.1. First-wave, Suffragettes and Anti-Consumerism

Historically speaking, the feminist movement first began with the suffragettes in the late Ninetieth Century. This would be later known as the First-Wave of Feminism (Eisenberg and Ruthsdotter § 9). These feminists began fighting for basic rights, mainly the right to vote. Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth C. Stanton were the two most influential feminists at that time for helping women to receive their right to vote (ibid). Stanton clearly outlined the movement when she declared at Seneca Falls that "we hold these truths to be self-evident that all men and women are created equal" (ibid).

Women finally gained the right to vote in 1920 with the passage of the 19th Amendment; however, the first-wave was not inclusive, as it focused mainly on the right of middle or upper-class white women (Rampton §4, 5). In fact, this wave

Chapter Two: Early Feminists' Consumer Activism

denied the rights of African Americans which pushed them to organize their own movement known as Sojourner Truth¹. This movement was established because African American women used to go through experiences, battles, and concerns that were different from what a white woman might witness, and among these concerns was the notion of femininity (Finch § 6).

As far as femininity and feminine woman are concerned, Rachael Jayne Groover states in her *Powerful and Feminine: How to Increase Your Magnetic Presence and Attract the Attention You Want* (2011), that a feminine woman is the one who spends most of her time in her feminine energy, in other words, she is a receiver of attention and help (115). She attempts to care about her feelings, and does not intend to push down or ignore her emotions. Groover argues that a feminine woman is compassionate and leans to accept different pieces of advice from people around her; people are drawn to her because of the way she is. This definition is completely ignored and even demolished by first-wave feminists, such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton (ibid).

From 1869 to 1880, Stanton organized various campaigns entitled "Our Girls" on the lyceum circuit². The title evolved from "The Coming Girl" in 1869 to "The Girl of the Future" in 1872 and finally to "Our Girls" in 1875 (Gordon 484). Stanton adapted her stories and her themes of the lecture to suit the immediate concerns of her audiences. Yet, she maintained the central thesis, in which she insisted that those young girls should reject artificial standards of beauty by pursuing the educational or vocational training they needed to reach their full potentials (ibid).

¹ Sojourner Truth (1797-1883) is an African American evangelist and reformer who applied her energies to the abolitionist and women's rights movements. As the daughter of slaves, she spent her childhood being abused by several masters. For more details, see this far by faith.com/sojourner/truth.

² The lyceum circuit is a hall in which public lectures, concerts, and similar programs are presented. From Encyclopedia Britannica.com

Chapter Two: Early Feminists' Consumer Activism

At first glance, "Our Girls" appeared to be a typical lyceum lecture in addressing an educational theme through entertaining anecdotes and tales (ibid). Adopting a motherly tender persona, Stanton told stories from her own experience as a mother of seven children and offered practical advice, later, the course of the lecture changed when Stanton began challenging conventional wisdom by urging women to fight for their daughters' right to grow up free from artificial constraints that stifled their ambition and potential (ibid). Exploring the connections between femininity, standards of dress, and the socialization of young girls, Stanton suggested that young girls were stifled by patriarchal customs (ibid).

In criticizing fashion and beauty standards, Stanton echoed early dress reform advocates like Mary Wollstonecraft and Sarah Grimke (Gordon 485). In Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792), the prevailing fashions of that time were artificial and unnatural and women were urged to be "left in a state nearer to nature." (152). Some forty years later, Sarah Grimke developed a similar critique of fashion and beauty standards in her *Letters on the Equality of the Sexes* (1837), in which she stated that not only women's tendency towards fashion was unnatural and harmful, but also it corrupted women's character. Thus, Grimke exemplified this feature by stating that too many women "dressed like dolls" in order to attract the lustful "eye of man." (71).

In resurrecting this debate, Stanton throughout *Our Girls*, argued that the standards of beauty and fashion violated the law of nature by molding woman into man's ideal (op.cit). Instead of following their natural instincts and pleasing themselves, young girls learned that woman was "made simply to please man" by an "endless variety in her costume" (Grimke 71). Like Wollstonecraft and Grimke before her, Stanton transcended the narrow concerns of comfort and convenience that

Chapter Two: Early Feminists' Consumer Activism

had defined the debate on dress reform and instead resurrected the larger moral critique of fashion where it required women to appear “half naked”, while men were “modestly clothed to the very chin” (9). At the end, women were nothing more than “French Courtesans”, whose life work is to fascinate man and hold for his selfish purposes. Women were reduced to play things for men’s salacious desires and became “men handy work” (8).

Moreover, Stanton declared that an equally disturbing consequence of patriarchal fashion standards was women's unhealthiness, in other words; she observed that prevailing fashion norms did violence to nature by artificially creating "small waists" and a "constrained gait" that harmed women's health (13). Subsequently, Stanton pointed out the extent to which fashion trends created unnatural constraints on the body and led to "moody, listless, weary" young girls (ibid). Therefore, Stanton argued that "unnatural restraints," prevented circulation "of the blood and action of the heart and lungs" and might even lead to nerve and muscle damage, such as headaches, earaches, and backaches (13). She advised all mothers to encourage their daughters to look naturally and to wear comfortable dresses instead of those narrow indecent clothes (14). According to her, women’s beauty is localized in their intelligence, strength and independence (ibid). In 2010, the Executive coach Marcia Reynolds and the author of *Wander Woman (2010)* published on the American magazine “Psychology Today” an article entitled: “What does it mean to be a feminine?” stating,

When I was young, my mother told me it was more important to be smart than feminine, being feminine meant I was weak. If I were to take care of myself in world I couldn’t depend on, I needed to be smart, strong and independent. I assumed this was the opposite of being feminine (1, 2§).

Chapter Two: Early Feminists' Consumer Activism

For this reason, early activists were skeptical of being consumers providing that following fashion trends, standards of dresses and beauty would prevent women from achieving their goal which is more important (Gurjot §5). Women, at that time, were in a deep concern to reach their target which was the right to vote; they did not have time for such vain and ridiculous aspects (ibid). Consumerism for them was a waste of time where time is worthy to spend it in remarkable, interesting and beneficial issues such as the economic depression that the nation was facing at that time (Rabin and Stevens 162); in this respect, Stanton reminded that "Fathers, Brothers, Husbands die, banks fail, houses are consumed with fire, friends prove treacherous, creditors grasping, and debtors dishonest."(489). In such circumstances, the only way a girl could survive was through the "skill and cunning" of her "own brain and hands" (ibid). Because for Stanton, living in a world without a skill, and follow only beauty and fashion, will obviously leave women in "helpless condition" (ibid).

II.1.2. Second -Wave Feminism: Femininity and Consumerism as a Patriarchal System

Despite the achievement that the first wave has accomplished, it was not inclusive enough to protect other non-white women (Gurjon § 1). For this reason, the second-wave was born out to be more inclusive by guaranteeing the rights of non-white women. While fighting for their rights, this wave focused on issues mainly like sexuality and reproductive rights. Moreover, the second wave not only concentrated on women of color, but also on those from different economic classes (Rampton § 10).

Chapter Two: Early Feminists' Consumer Activism

In this vein, Betty Friedan throughout her *Feminine Mystique* (1963) has succeeded to value sisterhood, in which she borrowed the widely used slogan “Class struggle is the women’s struggle! Women’s struggle is class struggle!” (Qtd.in Frederickson § 1). Friedan demonstrated how issues of race, class, and gender oppression are all related. However, she expounded throughout her book the real hidden face of femininity (Gurjon § 4). For that, one needs to distinguish between femininity and femaleness, a position which settle women’s liberation by expelling the misleading face of femininity to show the real female values that existed underneath (Hollows 11). In the same line of thought, Catharine MacKinnon argues that “socially femaleness means femininity, which means attractive to men, which means sexual attractiveness, which means sexual availability on male terms” (110). Second wave feminists saw the word femininity as fundamental to understanding men’s oppression to women; they claimed that those girls who took part in feminine values and behaviors were associated with passivity, submissiveness and dependence (Op.cit 11). According to them, in order to become a feminine, a woman must live under the patriarchal embodiment which is known as male dominance over woman in which she becomes implicated in men’s oppression (Millett 35).

In this respect, femininity is assumed to be the result of patriarchal domination as either the embodiment of subordination or as a set of embodied practices imposed by men (Friedan 167). Precisely because femininity is the embodiment of subordination, second-wave feminist perspective is the one that is against femininity that calls women to reject feminine embodiment or seek social change to eradicate the femininity enforced under patriarchy or male domination (ibid).

Chapter Two: Early Feminists' Consumer Activism

Since femininity is closely related to consumerism, Friedan points out that the publication of her book was especially consequential for the advertising industry in which she blames the latter for being the foremost cause for women's unhappiness in America 's post-war consumer culture and especially on advertisers' exploitation of women. She argues,

It is their millions which blanket the land with persuasive images, flattering the American housewife, diverting her guilt and disguising her growing emptiness. They have done this so successfully, employing the techniques and concepts of modern social science, and transposing them into those deceptively simple, clever, outrageous ads and commercials, that an observer of the American scene today accepts as fact that the great majority of American women have no ambition other than to be housewives. If they are not responsible for sending women home, they are surely responsible for keeping them there. (218-219)

Friedan's major complains started against advertising which was because of two main factors; the first element was seen in a number of women workers in ads industries who felt that it is high time to stand against the exploitative portrayals of women in ads and the sexual discrimination in hiring and promoting. Furthermore, women themselves agreed that these charges which are against ads are legitimate and legal (Friedan 223). The second element; however, was seen in the abnormal way of wealthy middle class women of purchasing huge quantities of products displayed by the American media (ibid).

The National Organization for Women (1966) was probably the most active organization that was formed to meet and achieve feminist goals ®. The NOW campaigned against the advertising industry for the misrepresenting images announced by media (Maclaran 465). It used various ways and tactics to boycott different beauty products such the Colgate –Palmolive Boycott (1968)³. The

³The Colgate –Palmolive Boycott (1968) was a boycott sponsored by NOW. It denied the use of all Colgate-Palmolive products in September the 5th to protest the company's long-

subcommittee member Edith Green announced her personal boycott, in which she declared,

I have made a personal resolve not to buy certain products advertised by ridiculing women; and I would hope that (women's groups) would really carry on a systematic boycott of products that in their advertising depict the woman as a supercilious idiot. This is what happens in a lot of the TV commercials. I see it and I think this is by design. We have gone past that stage. (428)

The reason why second feminist activists rejected and criticized the use of beauty products and cosmetics was due to the fact that these manufactures were only tools of sexual objectification and one of the strategies that man did to serve his own interest (Craig §17). The radical New York group called the Red stockings ⁴stated that wearing latest clothes, following fashion and putting make up is just to make the woman only a sexual object (ibid).

According to the second-wave's theoretical perspective, if femininity was defined and imposed by men; therefore, it would never serve women; on the contrary it would serve their own benefits (Schippers and Sapp 22). For this purpose, femininity must be surpassed, critiqued or better yet eradicated; second-wave feminists saw typically feminine objects like lipstick, high heels, and even bras as forms of male oppression (Harris 62). Mothers kept reminding their daughters with the true values of feminism by neglecting girly and girlishness attitudes which were not part of feminism (ibid).

II.1.3. Third-Wave feminism: Glorifying the Marketplace

With the help of feminists like Betty Freidan and many others, second-wave feminism has somehow accomplished its mission; however, the movement left other

standing fragrant discrimination against female employees. For more details, see: National Organization for Women.com

⁴ Redstockings was a name taken in 1969 by one of the founding women's liberation groups of the 1960's to represent the union. For more details, see: Redstockings.com.

Chapter Two: Early Feminists' Consumer Activism

unresolved issues such as sexuality freedom which led to the rise of another feminist wave to take over and complete the unfinished work left by the second-wave (Frederick § 8-15). The movement began in the late 1980's. Its main goal was to ensure that women are still demanding their rights by showing their discontent with the previous feminists. Rebecca Walker was one of the leading figures of this wave (VanNewKirk 12).

Walker is the daughter of the acclaimed second-waver, Alice Walker, was and dissatisfied with her mother's ideas on feminism. She firstly proclaimed her belonging to the next wave when she published an article entitled "Becoming the third-wave" in *Ms. Magazine* (1992) in which she stated "I am not a post-feminist feminist, I am the third wave" (39-41). Walker, alongside with her friends such as Barbara Findlen, called themselves "New Feminists who grew up with the idea of women and men, girls and boys, were equal" (XIV).

Walker influenced by the words of Cathryn Bailey who observed the life of the second-wave as being rigid, and stated that "the feminism of their mothers' generation is naïve, obsolete, or otherwise somehow lacking in relevance to their lives" (Bailey 21). Moreover, Walker demonstrated that the aim of the third-wave is to make it vivid by correcting its wrong understanding of feminism. She argued that so many young women viewed second-wavers' lifestyle as not suitable for women to express their freedom, individuality, and complexity (Zeigler 49). For this reason, young women declared that they do not want to be poor, hated and severely criticized; on the contrary, they want to be free, making money, and be admirably loved by everyone especially males (ibid).

When it comes to the term femininity, third-wavers describe femininity by social and cultural ideals concerning what a girl or a woman should be like

Chapter Two: Early Feminists' Consumer Activism

(Schippers and Sapp 31). Femininity is; therefore, not imposed or embodied by men; it is rather a freedom of choice for woman to practice her femininity using different tools in different ways and forms, "feminism isn't about what choice you make but the freedom to make that choice" (Rosen No.p). Jennifer Baumgartner and Amy Richards claimed that a feminist statement should declare its feminine pride by adopting the forms that extend the feminine side of woman (135). In this vein, third-wave activists believe that every woman should define her femininity for herself, and that women should not have to give up stereotypically feminine traits in order to be treated equally (ibid).

In the age of individualism, materialism and consumer culture, women play a great role in the world of economy today, "The largest growing economic force in the world isn't China or India -- its women"⁵ (Qtd in Cole & Crossley § 1). The idea of consumption became an essential concept; for third-wavers, women are independent social actors who express their identities and independence through consumption (Maclaran 466, 467). Hence, the third-wave embraces the market place where young women are able to balance between femininity and consumption; in other words, by the integration of consumer culture, women become more independent, free, and even powerful (467). Consumption, for them, is a source of empowerment as it is observed in the series *Sex and the City* (ibid).

"*Sex and The City*" is one of the famous HBO⁶ series in the United States; it is a popular American television series that began in 1998. It is considered as an example that shows the instability of feminist identity in postfeminist and postmodernist consumer culture (Arthurs 320). This is seen in its four female

⁵ KevinVoigt.2009. "Women: Saviors of the world economy?" (CNN.com) Qtd. in Cole & Crossley 1.

⁶ Home Box Office (HBO) is an American premium cable and satellite television network. It was launched by Time-Life Publishing Company in 1971. For more details, see urbandictionary.com/define/term/HBO.

Chapter Two: Early Feminists' Consumer Activism

characters which are presented as selective consumers depending on consumption for the purpose of describing their identity (ibid). Throughout this consumption, those female characters have diminished and limited the feminist value (321). Consumerism and consumption in this series are fundamental agents by which the characters attempt to create and shape their identity (Judith Butler 177). Arthurs states that those female characters tend to determine their identities upon this selective consumerism without even relying on men, because men in this series are seen as mere lifestyle accessories (179). Thus those females can form relationships with men without depending on them as indicators of identity of worth (ibid). Besides to some feminists who tend to argue that consumerism is the source from which both pleasure and power can be achieved (323).

In accordance to feminist identity which is constructed through consumerism, Jane Arthurs maintains that this construction is limited; since women tend to define their identities in accordance to consumerism, their moral centers and values are defined by class, and tastes rather than having deeper and more sophisticated understanding to the world, because postmodern consumer culture is “characterized by the commodification of individual’s relation to the body, self, and identity” (319).

In *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Judith Butler maintains that gender is both intentional and performative; the latter is seen in the women of *Sex and the City* who tend to perform their genders through consuming that is to say, by means of clothing, shopping, and fashion (177), for instance, the character Carrie is exemplified as wearing stylish dresses, along with her long, curly, and blonde hair. Besides to Miranda who is a practical character, is presented in sweatpants, and in more formal situations, she is shown as wearing loose-fitting and high-necked dresses with dark colors. Furthermore, Charlotte tends to choose more

Chapter Two: Early Feminists' Consumer Activism

chic outfits along with lace dresses. Samantha; however, is more oriented to vibrant colors, tight dresses, and low-cut clothes (ibid). These outfits and costumes indicate and symbolize their personalities since the former tend to distinguish them from one another; they tend to claim power, freedom, and individuality through their choice of the clothes, goods, and products that they tend to consume (Arthurs 325).

Those four main female characters are all attractive and fashioned women who see that the consumption of appearance is heavily important such as shoes. High heels present an exception since the latter are symbol of beauty and sexuality, in which the wearer takes pride in her appearance. In this series, fashion and consumption are seen as an expression of or as means toward independence and empowerment of women (Tozzy 56).

Since third-wave is about making life enjoyable and free, women in this trend tend to please themselves (Crawford 120). However, they feel sorry for their mothers who are still thinking that shopping is part of an exploitative patriarchal system (Kendal 235). Consequently, those women adopt their mothers' idea and try to turn it into a source of strength and pleasure because for them shopping in retail stores like Calvin Klein is one of their pleasures that relates girlishness with toughness (ibid).

The Powerpuff Girls⁷ together with the Riot Grrrl⁸ are other examples that particularly match third wave ideology with consumerism; both are well known with the notion of girl power which became the essential message of third-wave (Kendal 236). According to them, if a woman wants to be a powerful, then, she must possess girly behaviors; this final could only be achieved through consumerism which links girl power with purchasing power (ibid). These powers will help woman transfer

⁷ The Powerpuff Girls is an American animated television series created by the animator Craig McCracken for cartoon New York. For more details, see www.imbd.com/power-puff-girls.

⁸ The Riot Grrrl is an underground feminist punk movement that originated in the early 1990s in Washington State. For more details, see British Library.

Chapter Two: Early Feminists' Consumer Activism

from home dependent to self-reliant independent consumer. In other words, consumerism is the woman's savior (ibid)

The Powerpuff Girls are powerful due to their way of dressing which plays a great role in shaping their command and strength. To spotlight their girlishness, girls wear white stockings and Mary-Jane shoes, besides; girls had flights, heat and x-ray vision for the sake of representing them as super heroine (Op.cit).

Moreover, The Shopaholic series⁹ came just after the famous genre of fiction which is mostly known as The Chick-lit¹⁰ where the latter falls again under consumerism (Todd 55). One of the best Chick-lit novels was *legally Blonde* (2009). The protagonist Becky Bloomwood was fundamentally a Shopaholic character whose main purpose was to pay her heavy debts from her addiction towards purchasing expensive objects (56). Subsequently, this buying process has more psychological advantage that is like a therapy for women who seek self-mediation, despite the extreme levels of debts after it. Becky represents such type of women because for her shopping is a pleasure, she explained, "when I shop, the world gets better, and the world is better, but then it's not, and I need to do it again" (ibid).

Therefore for Becky, entering a store is like entering a consumer paradise. While shopping, she notices an amazing green Denny & George scarf, for her, that scarf will define her personality and be a source of happiness (Todd 56). She insisted to purchase it especially when the seller told her that the scarf will be part of her

⁹The Shopaholic series: are series of novels written by the UK author Sophie Kinsella, who also writes under her real name Madeleine Wickham. The books follow protagonist Rebecca Bloomwood through her adventures in shopping and life. As of October 2015, there are eight books in the series. The entire series has been optioned by a Hollywood studio. The first Shopaholic film was released February 13, 2009. Shopaholic is also a series of games. For more details, see: Revolvly Quiz.com

¹⁰A slang for a genre of literature geared towards female readers, which deal with modern issues in women's lives. The novel *Bridget Jones's Diary* is a form of Chick Lit.

Chapter Two: Early Feminists' Consumer Activism

psyche; she will be known as “The-Girl-In-The-Green-Scarf” (ibid). Like Becky succeeded to find her identity through shopping, the latter will certainly help other women to do the same (Ibid).

Conclusion

As it was mentioned above in this chapter, the word feminism went into three phases; each feminist phase gave it best arguments and proofs what is like to be a feminist. Primarily, for the first wave, the main focus was on women gaining the right to vote .Secondly, the idea of femininity together with consumerism was totally neglected in favor of what is most significant at that time. Second-wave feminists however, wanted to eradicate the image advertised on media that women must consume feminine products to be attractive and thus be vulnerable to sexual harassment. Feminine objects for them are just forms of male oppression. By contrast, third-wavers came with totally different opinions; feminism for them is not made only for females, but rather males also can possess that feminist sense. They broke the traditional view that beauty products are patriarchal formats, on the contrary; they highly consumed different products arguing that those objects are sources of power and pleasure.

Chapter Three

**The Reactions against Postfeminism of American
Consumer Culture**

Introduction

Postfeminists witnessed huge attacks from different sources for their new ideas that seemed to be different and inconvenient. This chapter is an attempt to detect different reactions towards postfeminism. Those reactions are perceived and recognized in three fundamental aspects. The first aspect is fundamentally concerned with the representation of postfeminism and women in popular culture. Subsequently, the second aspect is mainly concerned with the patriarchal society. Furthermore, the third aspect is fundamentally connected with the demonstration of other feminist groups' views against postfeminism. The chapter will also provide some brief definitions to each aspect in order to create a deeper understanding. Moreover, the purpose behind providing those definitions is to distinguish the different backgrounds and sources from which those reactions against postfeminism originate. Finally, this will help in creating a profound understanding about whether those reactions are in their right path, or are just mere misunderstandings and stereotypes against postfeminism.

III.1. Postfeminism and American Popular Culture

Prior to delving into the demonstration of the different representations of women and postfeminism in the popular culture, it is fundamentally crucial to provide an adequate definition to popular culture.

III.1.1. Definition of Popular Culture

John Storey, in his *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture* (2009), discusses different definitions of popular culture (5). He states that popular culture is that kind of culture which is greatly liked and preferred by the public (ibid). He also claims

Chapter Three: The Reactions against Postfeminism of American Consumer Culture

that such quantitative dimension of the popular culture in terms of the people who prefer it and follow it, justifies the popular sense of popular culture (6).

Moreover, Storey considers popular culture as a remnant and an inferior culture, whereas high culture is the product of individuals' sophisticated action of creation (ibid).

Another crucial definition to popular culture is that the latter is referred to as the mass culture that this is merely produced for mass consumption (Storey 7). This is seen as a commercial culture and its audience is a mere consumer who tends to consume this culture with a numbed and passive brain. Subsequently, this aspect shows the manipulative side of the popular culture (ibid). Maltby suggests that popular culture is an American culture and that it was invented in the great cities of the United States, and above all in New York City (11). In accordance to this claim Andrew Ross points out that for a long period ago, popular culture has been central in America dating back to the Industrial Revolution in the 18th century when densely populated cities helped in the spread of news of cultural items through new means of mass production (7). This attempted to make the consumption of those cultural items less expensive; those items included tabloid news magazines such as *The Boston Weekly Magazine*¹, and serial novels² (7).

Subsequently, popular culture is that culture which arises from the people (Storey 7). In other words it is the culture of the people and for the people; however, those people do not produce this popular culture from their own, this culture is

¹ The Boston Weekly Magazine appeared on March 3, 1743; it is one of the first magazines that appeared in Boston. For more details, see Part One Birth of American Magazines, p: 4. *PDF*

² The serial novel of the American novelist Charles Brockden Brown entitled *Arthur Mervyn; or, Memoirs of the Year 1793 (1799)* and the second part was published in September 1800. For more details, see *Archive Journal*. Issue 4, Spring 2014.

commercially provided (ibid) This is the case when a famous brand such as Levis Jeans uses songs of a well-known band such as The Jam³, for the purpose of selling their products (8). There is a sort of commercial dominance over culture, in this line Storey provides a valid example on this dominance (ibid). He states that there are several artists who witness high records for their songs because the latter's appearance in television commercials such as the songs of The Clash band that appeared in Levis Jeans commercials (ibid).

III.1.2.The Representation of Postfeminism in American Popular Culture

Feminism and commercial television have never been in accordance with each other because those commercials tend to reinforce and normalize the sexualisation and objectification of women (Berberick 2). Female characters are unfortunately used as tools for selling products from automobiles to food; since feminism was brought to the public's conscience and represented on television, it has always been assimilated with popular entertainment in an unpredictable, incoherent, and fragmented manner (Parkins 320). The mass media has promoted an impoverished vision of feminism, and joyfully has reported a discontent with postfeminism (Press and Strathman 5).

Moreover, postfeminism and women are being depicted in popular culture in different ways and forms. Rosalin Gill argues that postfeminism now is used as an icon to enrich the content of commodities (35). Advertisers attempt to reflect postfeminism in their advertisements as a promotion to their products (ibid). They intend to relate female empowerment, self-confidence, and freedom to consumption

³ The Jam was an English rock band; it was active during the late 1970s and early 1980s. For more details, see Discogs of The Jam Band.

Chapter Three: The Reactions against Postfeminism of American Consumer Culture

as an attempt to reduce the political meanings of the concept postfeminism and link it to a personal life style (36). Trier-Bieniek argues that the imagery of postfeminism in the media and popular culture degrades and objectifies women by producing some social expectations that may demolish relationships between men and women, and even distort women's relationships to their own bodies (37). In the advertisements appearing in magazines women are displayed as white, skinny, and young models who uphold unattainable norms of beauty, besides to the music videos where women are shown as sexy, and nearly-naked dancers whose main purpose is to shore up male performers (ibid). Subsequently, in reality TV shows women are represented as fighting for the attention of men in addition to pornography aspect that dehumanizes women and fragments their bodies (40).

Subsequently, Gill argues that there is a significant shift in popular culture and advertising representations of women in recent years. Young women are being presented now as active, independent, and sexually powerful, rather than being depicted as passive objects of the male gaze (53). Gill mentions the satirical magazine *The Onion*⁴, and speaks about its recently declared headline that took place in 15th September, 2016 entitled "Women Now Empowered by Everything a Woman Does"(55) The article compares how back in the 1970s and 1980s women's liberation struggles were concentrated on obtaining equality in workplace, sexual freedoms, and reproductive rights (55). However, the article emphasizes that today the focus has changed, and the word empowerment is understood more openly. It argues that women's trivial acts of purchasing a pair of shoes, or eating a particular brand of cereal bar, are now considered as acts of female empowerment the same as

⁴ The Onion is an American digital media company created in 1993. It is based in Chicago. The Onion is news satire organization which publishes articles on international, national, and local news. For more details, see an article entitled About The Onion in the website of the company called The Onion.

Chapter Three: The Reactions against Postfeminism of American Consumer Culture

participating in a demonstration (56). Gill claims that this article holds within two fundamental satirical targets; the first aim is the increasing trend within modern advertising to promote products targeted at women employing the discourse of empowerment (57). The sense of empowerment comes from the different fashion choices that women are convinced to make in order to be empowered (ibid). She argues that through the different media outlets women are convinced that wearing designs from famous brands such as Michael Kors brand designs will make them look stronger, more independent, and more powerful in people's eyes (61). This is contradictory, according to Gill. On the one hand, women are asked to wear and purchase entirely everything that is fancy, on the other hand they are blamed for doing so (ibid). Barbara Klein says in her article "Women Now Empowered by Everything a Woman Does",

From what she eats for breakfast to the way she cleans her home, today's woman lives in a state of near-constant empowerment. Shopping for shoes has emerged as a powerful means by which women assert their autonomy. Owning and wearing dozens of pairs of shoes is a compelling way for a woman to announce that she is strong and independent, and can shoe herself without the help of a man. She's saying, look out, male dominated world; here comes me and my shoes. (3)

Gill suggests that the joke is in the successful HBO series of *Sex and the City* along with its huge and endless focus on Manolo Blahnik⁵ (62). She indicates that people, in modern times, are told that high heeled shoes are symbolic of a powerful and confident femininity; yet in this postfeminist moment high heels become filled with sexual meanings (64).

⁵ Manolo Blahnik (November 27th, 1942) is a Spanish fashion designer, and the founder of eponymous high-end shoe brand. For more details, see Encyclopedia Britannica: Manuel Blahnik Rodriguez.

Chapter Three: The Reactions against Postfeminism of American Consumer Culture

Therefore, these advertising discourses put a huge emphasis on women's sexual agency (Gill 148). Ken Plummer argues that sex has become the big story and female sexual desire plays a fundamental part in it (108). Discourses of women's desire seem to be everywhere in all popular culture forms, for instance the figures of "raunchy" female pop stars who tend to borrow a set of pornography codes to present themselves, such as Christina Aguilera⁶'s song entitled "Dirrty" from her 2002 album "Stripped" (Gill 149). In the middle of celebrity culture, the stories and the tales of sexy secrets and dirty fantasies seem to be everywhere; therefore, popular culture in general and advertising in particular are one of the sites in which sexualized representations of women are widespread (ibid).

Robert Goldman concludes that advertising, throughout its history, has changed permanently as a consequence to the changes that took place in the economy, social relations, and technology (34). However, in the last two decades, the changes were significant, especially after the emergence of a new generation that arose from music television, computer games, and its growing confidence in ideas and the news spread by the media (37). Susan Douglas writes,

Advertising agencies had figured out how to make feminism and anti-feminism work for them, the appropriation of feminist desires and feminist rhetoric by Revlon, Lancôme and other major corporations was nothing short of spectacular. Women's liberation metamorphosed into female narcissism unchained as political concepts like liberation and equality were collapsed into distinctly personal, private desires. (247-248)

According to Rosalin Gill this critique clarifies the involvement of advertising in what is called the manipulation and the influence on mainstream ideas,

⁶ Christina Aguilera was born on December 18th 1980 in New York. She is an American singer, songwriter, actress and television personality. For more details, see IMDb.com Christina Aguilera Biography.

Chapter Three: The Reactions against Postfeminism of American Consumer Culture

in other words popular culture along with its different forms are being manipulative while speaking about feminist empowerment and independence (150).

Thereafter, Susan Bordo argues that the construction of these new figures of attractive, young, and heterosexual women becomes known in several advertising circles as “the midriff” (195). This term is named after the tendency of displaying a particular part of the body such as showing pierced belly button (ibid). The significance of the midriff is to show that if women of the 1950s used to have a fundamental focus which was home, now in modern times the focus shifted to be the body (Gill 152). Gill denotes that it is widely common nowadays that the portrayals of women’s body in all popular culture categories are considered as the primary sources of their capital from which they make a living (155). She suggests that such notions seem to cause a profound shift in the definition of feminism and femininity (ibid). Among the definitions that are modified is the notion that femininity is defined as bodily property rather than a social structural property (156). Another feature is the concept of possessing a sexy body which is presented as women’s fundamental source of identity, instead of caring or nurturing or even motherhood (157). Furthermore, women bodies are presented in a sexual manner where once the sexualized representations of women in media showed them as passive objects; nowadays women are presented active, desiring sexual subjects holding within a sense of subjectification because it suits their interests and their tendencies (158). Gill exemplifies this feature in a 1994 advert for Wonderbra⁷ that portrayed the

⁷ The Wonderbra is best known in the United States as a push-up brassiere (bra) style re-introduced to the U.S. market in 1994. For more details, see findwords.info.

model Eva Herzigova⁸ with her smiling face, along with an obscene quotation extracted from Mae West⁹ (159).

Consequently, Gill suggests that the most sobering aspect about these adverts is their implicit messages about the reputation of women and postfeminism and even gender relations (24). Subsequently, popular culture and its different categories tend to manipulate mainstream thoughts about postfeminist's attitudes, principles, and goals (34). Another aspect concerning this mode of representation is that it relies upon a polarized understanding of gender which doesn't merely see men and women as fundamentally different, but regards their relation as characterized by competition, animosity, as well as sexual attraction (35). Gill adds that these adverts tend to implicitly animate the sense of conflict by individualizing and personifying more general notions of "battle of the sexes" (36). She concludes that in this way, rather than suggesting and opening up a set of possibilities that help for new ways of living, or creatively reimagining relationships between men and women, the countless potentialities are closed down and the only remaining option is the harsh and cruel attack against one another (39).

III.2. Patriarchal society's Reaction towards postfeminism

Sherry B. Ortner argues that patriarchy is everywhere, and this patriarchy is what best describes this twenty-first century American audience (530). She states that patriarchy is a system of social power, shaping cultural categories and personal identities extending through male dominance covered in an ideology based on control, protection, and benevolence not only (532). Furthermore, Ortner clarifies

⁸ Eva Herzigova (March 10th, 1973) is a Czech model and actress. For more details, see IMDb.com Eva Herzigova.

⁹ Mae West (August 17th, 1893 – November 22nd, 1980) is an American actress, singer, playwright, comedian, and sex symbol whose entertainment career spanned seven decades. For more details, see IMDb.com Mae West.

Chapter Three: The Reactions against Postfeminism of American Consumer Culture

that patriarchy is not a matter of just some retrograde individual men, it is rather an ongoing system of power (ibid). Therefore, she adds that postfeminism is seen by the patriarchal society as anti-male and that amongst the reactions of American society towards the feminist movement is that today there is no such thing as postfeminism. According to her, postfeminism has unfortunately been absorbed by neoliberalism and it has been saturated with materialistic thoughts that contradict what early feminists used to believe in (533).

Subsequently, Ortner states that postfeminism becomes sexist against men, and this is what the patriarchal society attempts to claim while reacting against postfeminism (540). However, Elizabeth King asserts that this argument is one of the first things that anyone who doesn't fully understand what is meant by oppression will give such claim (10). She suggests that the only effective way to address such assertion, a discussion about how oppression works must be done (ibid). Oppression, according to her, functions only in one direction, from the privileged oppressor to the oppressed; this act of oppression is a culturally and socially supported misuse of power that aims at keeping one particular group on the top, and other groups beneath in many significances mainly physically and financially (11). Therefore, King asks a question, can women be biased against men, say rude things to them, or treat them poorly? She provides a positive answer to this question, yet stating that these are incidents of discrimination, not oppression or sexism (ibid). King concludes with a clear definition of sexism saying that this concept can be applied when a certain sex or gender is systematically discriminated against, to an extent where this particular sex is treated as subordinate or otherwise less than the dominant group (12). She ends up stating that men cannot be victims of sexism, and that they cannot be socially, culturally, or legally oppressed by women (ibid).

III.3.The Reaction of Other Feminist Groups towards Postfeminism

Postfeminism has become the most talked issue especially in recent days. The concept of postfeminism is differently regarded from woman to woman or from feminist group to another (Tekanji §1). For this reason, providing an agreed upon definition to postfeminism is still not yet accomplished (ibid).

As a matter of fact, we are now living in a postfeminist period where contemporary popular culture context influences women's lives greatly (Kerouac §2). Postfeminism brought new changes in women's status in the society in which conventional ideas of feminism and femininity are revolutionized (ibid). As an attempt to decipher the term postfeminism, Angela McRobbie divided the word into "post" and "feminism;" the prefix 'post' denotes the phase after feminism where women won many battles for equality and permitted them to reap the benefits of a new gender regime (255). This phenomenon is marked by the following features, the shift from the sexual objectification to the sexual subjectification of women, empowering modern ladies, and women's high consumption of popular culture products (256).

Moreover, different scholars have agreed on many factors that led to the emergence of postfeminism, among which is the media. The latter is regarded as the most used tool by postfeminists whom relied on while extending their new unconventional demands (Tucker 39). By meaning of the prefix "post," some articles on the one hand declared that feminism is now dead (Ebeling 116); on the other hand, Claudia Wallis argues that postfeminism was created as a social category in the early 90s "feminism is not dead. And, baby, there's still a long way to go" (80, 89).

Chapter Three: The Reactions against Postfeminism of American Consumer Culture

Others; however, such as Betty Freidan referred to postfeminism as “the new feminist mystique” (Hall and Rodriguez 878).

Subsequently, Susan Faludi explains that those young women insisted on showing their discontent with their predecessors without even being aware about their main goal which is the thing that led so many traditional old feminists oppose these new radical postfeminists (Qtd. in McRobbie 255)¹⁰.

Several reasons made postfeminism being disliked and criticized. The feminist writer Gloria Jean Watkins, who is better known by her pen name bell hooks, noted that “too many women have ceased to support the feminist struggle because the ideology has been too dogmatic, too absolutist, too closed. They have left feminist movement” (Zuckerman §3). Besides, a 2013 economist poll best summarizes the feminist movement’s gradual decline where it found that only 28 percent of the American population and 38 percent of feminists consider themselves to be feminists (ibid).

Betty Friedan was dissatisfied with postfeminist ideals; therefore, she discussed a profound analysis of women's movement in America which is characterized by the “failure to mobilize the young generation who take for granted and do not defend the rights being taken away in front of our eyes.” (26). Furthermore, Friedan, in her rebellious article entitled “How to Get the Women’s Movement Moving Again,” listed the most evident weaknesses of the movement by making a clash over strategy that upset a lot of people in which she called the young generation to revive their activity by stressing important and interesting issues rather than wasting their energy in useless issues (22). According to her, the movement “is

¹⁰ Susan Faludi. *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women* (New York: Crown Inc, 1991) 19, qtd.in McRobbie 255.

Chapter Three: The Reactions against Postfeminism of American Consumer Culture

in trouble” and the problem is in the strategy which needs to be changed (25). Friedan used the example of pornography that worsened most women's lives (29). In this regard, she proposed another solution for her own daughter and others of her generation by developing another speech on July 5th, 1981 entitled “Feminism’s next step” published on the American web Newspaper “The New York Times” in order to speak loudly about other crucial needs such as needs for love, security, men, children, family, and home (§ 10,52).

Thereafter, Maureen Dowd observed that while second-wave feminists considered that achieving economic and political rights were their main source of power, postfeminists; however, saw sex as their fundamental source of power (3). She criticized postfeminist attitudes stating that “What I don’t like now is that young women are dressing alike, looking alike and thinking alike. The plumage is more colorful, the shapes are more curvy, the look is more plastic, and the message is diametrically opposite before it was, don’t be a sex object; now it’s be a sex object” (7). It is worth noting that all these features developed with the development of the media such as the prime time television series, journal articles, print media, and magazines (Kulcsar § 11,16).

For this reason Susan Douglas blamed the media for presenting such a type of feminism which is “now irrelevant and even undesirable because it made millions of women unhappy, unfeminine, childless, lonely, and bitter” (1). This contemporary version of feminism can be best seen and summarized in *Bridget Jones’s Diary’s*¹¹ female character (Kulcsar § 10). The character Bridget is both morally and economically independent; however, her goal is to find “Mr. Right” (ibid).

¹¹Bridget Jones’s Diary is a romantic love story comedy from the best-selling novel of the same name by Helen Fielding. A chaotic Jones meets a snobbish lawyer named Marc and soon he enters into her world of imperfections. For more details, see: The Galileo Open Air Cinema.

Chapter Three: The Reactions against Postfeminism of American Consumer Culture

Moreover, in order to appeal to male desire, she constantly monitors and disciplines her body; for instance, she is always conscious about how she behaves and what she says; she permanently watches her weight, reads about how to be properly a feminine and fashionable; meanwhile, she writes a diary about all these (ibid). Since she is living alone, she enjoys sexual freedom with men whom she encounters. Helen Fielding contrasts this liberation to the life of her mother who believes that she has wasted her life stating angrily “I’ll just clean the house like Germaine sodding Greer and the Invisible Woman” (47). For this reason, feminists like Isobel Armstrong rejects the possibility of postfeminism so wholeheartedly, “We can never become post-feminists” (Hodgkin 63).

Both popular media and scholarly articles have found that lots of women have become antifeminists from 1980 to 1990. One of these antifeminists stated that “I don't support feminism because it simply does not speak my language. It's a matter of style, of attitude” (Bolotin 103). While Epstein declared that “there is no longer a mass women's movement. There has been a near-disappearance of a movement that not so long ago was strong enough to bring about major changes in the social and cultural landscape” (1). The support for the women's movement has decreased because the reasons that postfeminists were fighting for are nothing but ridiculous and measly (ibid).

Furthermore, negative representations of the women's movement in popular media are identified as a significant factor prompting the redefinition of feminism. Given the negative media representation of feminists as unattractive, unfeminine, and lesbians, young women resist the label of feminism because they fear it distances them from men, marriage, and motherhood (Hall and Rodriguez 884). The British

Chapter Three: The Reactions against Postfeminism of American Consumer Culture

actress and the new activist Emma Watson considers postfeminism as being about men-hating in which she stated that “the more I have spoken about feminism, the more I have realized that fighting for women’s rights has too often become synonymous with man-hating”¹². Unlike the American poet and activist Robin Morgan who admitted in her *In Going Too Far: The Personal Chronicle of a Feminist* (1978) unashamedly “I feel that man-hating is an honorable and viable political act” (178). However, this effort seems to make men inferior and not to elevate the position of women. It starkly contrasts with the goal of early feminists because feminism used to be about equality and not female superiority (Khan §5).

In addition, Renzetti explains that nearly half of the college women adopted the no, but¹³ attitudes that are based on “their perceptions that women can succeed as individuals, without collective efforts.” (274). In Buschman and Lenart’s article entitled “I Am Not a Feminist, But...” (1996) classified one-third of women as postfeminists because they believe that the women's movement has virtually eliminated discrimination and; therefore, individual efforts are the key to women's advancement which is not true (59-75).

In this respect, feminism used to be about structural real changes and not about radical cultural changes and tokenistic gestures. Substantially, feminism wasn’t always as narrow and petty as it is today, it was once about equality for all and true freedom (Khan § 7). Just like Gloria Steinem put it well, “it’s about making life

¹² Emma Watson UN Women Goodwill Ambassador Emma Watson launches, in 2014, the “HeForShe” campaign, talking about her experience and views on feminism and equality, in a speech entitled “Gender Equality is Your Issue Too”. For more details, see: rappler.com/world/regions/us-canada/69726-emma-watson-gender-equality.

¹³ The “No, But”: are new developed version of women are reluctant to define themselves with the feminist label, but they approve of and indeed demand equal pay, economic independence, sexual freedom, and reproductive choice. For more details, see: Laurie Ouellette’s *Our Turn Now: Reflections of a 26-year-old Feminist*. 1992, pages: 118-120.

fairer for women everywhere. It's not about a piece of the existing pie; there are too many of us for that. It's about baking a new pie." (Butterworth §1).

Conclusion

Through the main points that have been previously tackled, the present chapter aimed at presenting the different reactions towards postfeminism. In order to meet such an end, we divided third chapter into three sections. In the first part, we displayed the different definitions of popular culture provided by John Storey, along with depicting the negative representations of women and postfeminism in popular culture. The second section; however, dealt with the reactions of the patriarchal society towards the new ideals, attitudes, and principles of postfeminists. Finally, in the third and last part, we presented other feminists thoughts and reflections on postfeminism. Hence, those negative reactions and portrayals of postfeminists are mere misinterpretations and stereotypes towards postfeminism.

General Conclusion

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The present study dealt mainly with the representation of postfeminism in Consumer Culture, the investigation and detection of the reasons behind the confusions and the contradictions that arose in understanding postfeminism at the turn of the 21st century. The study's main interests were to shed the light on postfeminists' opinions and views towards consumer culture and to present how the relation between postfeminism and consumerism was depicted and seen by popular culture, patriarchal society, and even by other feminist groups.

This dissertation began with an introduction to feminism along with the demonstration of the origins of the term. The first chapter attempted to provide an adequate definition to the term along with elucidating the different waves of feminism that appeared through history. Subsequently, a large part was devoted to the crucial terms postfeminism and consumer culture along with their significances.

Postfeminists and consumer culture possess a very crucial relationship unlike their predecessors. Early feminists used to have a negative vision on the integration of women in consumerism. However, this vision changed by the appearance of the third-wave as well as postfeminism; this shift shocked the American public which led them reject postfeminism. All these aspects were tackled in the second chapter as an attempt to clarify the previous waves' critiques on consumerism, and the reasons that made postfeminists willing to adopt it. Hence, the second chapter ended with a section that explained the relation that exists between feminist identity and consumerism in relation to the HBO series "Sex and the City".

The dissertation ended with the presentation of the different reactions towards postfeminism. Those reactions were extracted from the representations of women and postfeminism in popular culture where postfeminists reacted and said that those

General Conclusion

negative representations do not mirror the real essence of postfeminism nor echo what this version is calling for. And then we moved to the reactions of the patriarchal society which stated that postfeminism is anti-man and that it has been saturated by materialistic thoughts that contradict what early feminists believed in; therefore, postfeminists reacted that postfeminism seeks equality between men and women and that when postfeminists focused on consumerism was because the world of today is actually concentrating on consumerism and not because postfeminists are driven or are controlled by materialistic thoughts. Finally, we dealt with the reactions of other feminist groups who convicted postfeminism of being anti-male, victimizing and objectifying women, yet postfeminists reacted and said that one of the major aims of postfeminism is to empower women in all domains in order to be independent and able to do everything without returning to men's approval or men's help. The third chapter concluded that postfeminists are unfortunately confronted with stereotypes that the media and all its different forms tend to popularize. Hence, media outlets played and still play a great role in manipulating and controlling over people's minds. The imagery of postfeminism in the media and popular culture degrades and objectifies women by producing some social expectations that may demolish relationships between men and women and even distort women's relationships to their own bodies. Therefore, the mass media has promoted an impoverished vision of feminism, and joyfully has reported a discontent with postfeminism.

Hence, this work displayed the different issues that challenge postfeminism and attempted to make a contribution in understanding feminists' continuous struggle to overcome stereotypes and preconceived ideas being perpetrated by many sources which eventually harmed postfeminists' reputation.

General Conclusion

We hope our research has somehow contributed to a better understanding to the topic of postfeminism. We believe it will set the stage for further studies about this particular version of feminism. This field of study is still debatable and further researches are highly recommended not only from the perspective that our research did tackle but also from other different, unsolved, and hidden sides in order to disclosure the real essence of postfeminism, and help people abolish the stereotypes and begin understanding it in an accurate manner.

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