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**Post-feminist Backlash in Chick Lit Novels: The Devil Wears
Prada (2003) and The Singles Game (2016) By Lauren
Weisberger**

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Dedication

I dedicate this work to all my precious and dear family

To my mother Nedjma

To my father Abdlrahmane

To my sister Asmaa

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Abstract:

Chick lit emerged as a literary genre three decades ago. Chick lit swept the literary world by storm overnight and transformed the world of contemporary women's fiction. Chick lit's light tone makes it easy to overlook the idea that chick lit novels still reinforce patriarchal views about women. Therefore, this work sets to prove the presence post-feminist backlash in chick lit novels through the analysis of two chick lit novels. In Lauren Weisberger's two chick lit novels *The Devil Wears Prada* (2003) and *The Singles Game* (2016), post-feminist backlash against women is an underlying presence. In both novels patriarchal views about women and professional work are reestablished. Through the depiction of miserable stressed career women, the novels implies that women are not fit for professional career and a happy, fulfilled women to leads a more domestic lifestyle. Moreover, *The Singles Game* showcases the renewed focus on female body in the women's sports and exposes underlying sexism that still prevails in western society. Furthermore, *The Devil Wears Prada* showcases the dangers of women in power.

Keywords: chick lit, post-feminism, backlash, consumer culture, patriarchy, women's sport.

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General Introduction

General Introduction

Chick lit is a controversial concept that emerged as a literary genre three decades ago. Its inception is generally linked to Helen Fielding's *Bridget Jones's Diary* that was published in 1996. The genre was heavily marketed and became popular overnight with chick lit titles topping bestseller lists. Today, there are imprints and bookstore sections devoted entirely to chick lit. The term itself spiked a lot of controversy with its combination of "two terms with negative connotations: chick (the slang reference for a woman) and lit (the shortening of "literature" to "lit" typically denotes frivolity or insignificance)." (Rende, 3). As a whole, chick lit refers to literary works written by women, targeted towards women, and essentially focusing on the social lives and relationships of modern women. These novels are particularly popular amongst women because they depict scenarios which many women in the real world can relate to. Despite its immense popularity with readers; critics have largely disapproved of the genre. It is often criticized as "fluffy, mind-numbing trash" and "formulaic vapid prose" (Montgomery). Authors such as Caroline Smith respond that the heavy criticism aimed at chick lit stems from historically rooted biases against both popular fiction and women's writing in general.

Some authors argue that in comparison to the previous heroines of romance fiction, present chick lit heroines are depicted as having more freedom and equality in terms of career and sexual constructs. Moreover, they claim that this change is a result of post-feminism. In *Bridget Jones, Prince Charming, and Happily Ever Afters: Chick Lit as an Extension of the Fairy Tale in a Postfeminist Society*, Rende analyzes four chick lit novels and argues that chick lit novels are postfeminist retellings of traditional fairytales. Moreover, Rende claims that while chick lit heroines do not identify themselves as feminists, they still benefit from second-wave feminism. Thus, they now live in a postfeminist society wherein they are completely equal to men through their financial, career, and sexual independence.

This work, however, will tackle an opposite view the relationship between chick lit and post-feminism and discuss how chick lit represents the backlash against women in contemporary western society. Chick lit's light tone makes it easy to overlook the idea that chick lit novels still reinforce patriarchal views about women. Therefore, this work will set to prove the presence post-feminist backlash in chick lit novels. This research paper aims to show how the post-feminism notions of backlash are reinforced in chick lit novels through the analysis of two of Lauren Weisberger's chick lit novels *The Devil Wears Prada* and *The Singles Game*.

The work is divided into three chapters. In the first chapter, the theoretical framework of the study will provided. The different terms and concepts will be explained. First, Chick lit will be defined and some of its characteristics will be explained. Moreover, the concept of post-feminism will explored. An explanation of the wide range of meanings surrounding post feminism will also be discussed and post feminism as in backlash will be highlighted. The second chapter will provide a biography of the author and an overview of *The Devil Wears Prada*. Furthermore, it will also discuss post-feminist backlash in *The Devil Wears Prada*. The third chapter will provide an overview of *The Singles Game*. It will also explore the position of women in the world of sports. In addition, I will discuss post-feminism back lash in *The Singles Game*.

Chapter One:
Theoretical Background

I.1 Introduction:

This chapter will provide an explanation of some of the terms and concepts that are central to this work. First, Chick lit will be defined and some of its characteristics will be explained. The position of romance within chick lit, the difference between chick lit and the romance genre, and the connection between chick lit and consumer culture will also be explored. Besides, some chick lit conventions will be mentioned. Moreover, this chapter will also explore the concept of post feminism. An explanation of the wide range of meanings surrounding post feminism will also be discussed and post feminism as in backlash will be highlighted.

I.2 Chick Lit Definition:

Chick Lit is a literary sub-genre that is written by women, targeted towards women, and essentially focuses on the social lives and relationships of women in contemporary western society. At its onset, the genre was narrowly defined in that protagonist was a white, middle class, and single British or American woman in her late twenties or early thirties who lived in metropolitan areas.

Since then, Protagonists have varied widely in ethnicity, age, social status, material status, career and religion. These novels are usually written in the first-person narrative, and they have a light and humorous tone. The plots center on modern women's life issues such as love, marriage, dating, relationships, friendships, roommates, corporate environments, weight issues, addiction, and the like. Chick Lit novel is also characterized by its peculiar cover

which is very feminine. They generally have bright colors and feature feminine articles of clothing, accessories and makeup, and female body parts.

According to Natalie Rende the term itself is a combination of “two terms with negative connotations: chick (the slang reference for a woman) and lit (the shortening of “literature” to “lit” typically denotes frivolity or insignificance).” It was first adopted by Cris Mazza and Jeffrey Deshell in the anthology *Chick Lit: Postfeminist Fiction. In "Who's Laughing Now? A Short History of Chick Lit and the Perversion of a Genre"* in 1995. (3)

I.3 Romance in Chick Lit:

Chick lit is sometimes seen as a rewriting or sub-genre of romantic fiction; however, the two genres differ significantly. The Romance Writers of America association provides a clear-cut definition identifying the two components of a ‘romance novel’:

“Two basic elements comprise every romance novel: a central love story and an emotionally-satisfying and optimistic ending. A Central Love Story – In a romance novel, the main plot centers around two individuals falling in love and struggling to make the relationship work. [...] An Emotionally-Satisfying and Optimistic Ending – Romance novels are based on the idea of an innate emotional justice – the notion that good people in the world are rewarded and evil people are punished [...] Once the central love story and optimistic-ending criteria are met, a romance novel can be set anywhere and involve any number of plot elements. These settings and distinctions of plot create specific subgenres within romance fiction.” (qtd.in Montoro, 8-9)

While romance is a recurrent theme in chick lit novels, it rarely is the “backbone” of the narrative; moreover, a successful relationship is not always accomplished at the end of chick lit novels. *The Devil Wears Prada* is a case in point as the protagonist Andy in the end takes control of her life and career but loses her boyfriend in the process.

Furthermore, chick lit portrays a protagonist that is sexually liberated but dejected and skeptical when it comes to love and marriage. It is not uncommon for the protagonist to have various intimate encounters throughout the story, including one-night stands, and sometimes the prospect of love is so bleak that the protagonist begins to equate man to sex, and only sex. In many cases, Marriage is very stressful subject for the protagonist who feels pressured by relatives and societal expectations to find a man and settle down before the biological clock stops ticking. The protagonist struggles to find a perfect balance between personal and professional life.

I.4 Consumer Culture in Chick Lit:

Contemporary Western society is very much a materialistic consumer society in which people consider material goods to be requirement and indicator of a good successful life. In this consumer culture, people/customers are encouraged to spend money on material goods to achieve the ideal lifestyle in a capitalist economy. Chick lit authors connect their novels to popular consumer culture through their references to magazines, self-help books, romantic comedies, and domestic-advice manuals.

Consumer culture mediums are an essential component in chick lit novels. In many chick lit narratives, the protagonist is depicted as very dependent on and easily influenced by fashion magazines and self-help books. She strives to achieve the impossible standards set up by fashion magazines by following their unreasonable guidelines, and she relies heavily on

advice manuals throughout her romantic journey. *Cosmopolitan Culture and Consumerism in Chick Lit* demonstrates the variety of ways that these manuals are referenced in chick lit novels:

“In *Bridget Jones’s Diary*, we see how Bridget continually compares herself to the ideal offered by women’s magazines while Melissa Bank’s Jane Rosenthal (*The Girls’ Guide to Hunting and Fishing*, 1999) reads a dating, self-help book in the hopes of finding a man. Carol Wolper’s narrator from *The Cigarette Girl* (1999), a screenwriter of action films, puzzles over the fact that her life does not follow the simple plotline of a romantic comedy. And, Helen Bradshaw, of Anna Maxted’s *Getting Over It* (2000), consults home decorating magazines and catalogues in an attempt to construct the ideal home for herself.” (Smith, 5)

However, these magazines and advice manuals end up causing more problems for the protagonists than helping. Thus, chick lit novels seem to question the reliability of the manuals and ultimately challenging the consumer industry as a whole.

Sophie Kinsella’s *The Secret Dreamworld of a Shopaholic* is a representation of shopping and consumerism that acts as a cautionary tale about the excessive spending habit encouraged by women’s magazines. Kinsella’s protagonist, Becky Bloomwood, is the embodiment women’s magazines “ideal” reader, a woman who follows the instruction to the letter without thinking. Moreover, she also represents the ideal consumer as she tends to identify herself by her clothing and uses shopping as an emotional crutch. As Smith points out, Becky views fashion and clothing as a means of moving up the social ladder:

“When Becky spends money it is not just with the intention that this spending will lead to an overall improvement in her lifestyle. She also hopes

that these purchases will help to give her the appearance of a more affluent lifestyle. As Ellen McCracken notes, this consumer ideology is often conveyed by women's magazines, which capitalize upon consumers' desire for upward mobility by encouraging them to purchase products that give them the appearance of affluence." (39-40)

Though Becky spirals into crippling consumer debt, she continues to purchase those items promoted by women's magazines in the hopes of achieving the lifestyle associated with them. By depicting this image of the extreme shopper Kinsella criticizes the tendency of women's magazines to encourage women's incessant yet ever-changing shopping habits and comments ironically on her character's behavior as a consumer.

I.5 Chick Lit Conventions:

Despite its immense popularity with readers; critics have largely disapproved of Chick lit. In *The New York Times* review of Bridget Jones's Diary, Alex Kuczynski, writes: "Bridget is such a sorry spectacle, wallowing in her man-crazed helplessness, that her foolishness cannot be excused." while Beryl Bainbridge called the genre "a froth sort of thing"(Smith, 3). While chick lit is often criticized as "fluffy, mind-numbing trash" and "formulaic vapid prose" (Montgomery), authors such as Caroline Smith respond that the heavy criticism aimed at chick lit stems from historically rooted biases against both popular fiction and women's writing. Any writing created by women for women is often disregarded as superficial.

Moreover, there much debate over the definition and scope of chick lit. Many authors have pointed that chick lit novels seem to follow a generic formula:

“...author, reader and protagonist are female, with the latter living in a markedly consumerist society in which she thrives; additionally, the original Chick Lit novels tend to prefer a woman who is white, middle-class, heterosexual, young and single. This woman also has some idealistic romantic aspirations and beliefs which often give rise to comedic moments; comedy, in turn, is further exploited as a means to disguise this protagonist’s shortcomings and some of her many flaws as well as to downplay the general vicissitudes of her life. Finally, the physical packaging of these novels uniformly links the genre in the way particular semiotic resources are exploited.” (Montoro, 3)

Similarly, Rende identified the ingredients Chick lit recipe as follows:

“• A ‘young’ female protagonist (typically post-graduate, mid-20s through early 30s) • A posh urban setting, most frequently Manhattan, New York City or London—a Los Angeles or Philadelphia thrown in here and there • An occupation based primarily in the communications industry i.e. publishing, advertising, public relations, journalism, fashion Problems in the workplace, which typically occupy a significant portion of the text, ranging from insufferable coworkers (usually other women), an infatuation with either the boss or a male coworker, or being stuck in a ‘dead end’ job (usually a given) • Frequent romantic entanglements, but remains single throughout much of the text (and woefully laments such a status) until the ending • Excessive compulsive behaviors i.e. obsessively spending money, strict dieting • Eccentric mothers who represent foils to their ‘independent’ daughters” (4-5)

However, Montoro also points out that the formula has been subjected to many changes over the years. By now, the offshoots of chick lit have diverged quite a lot from the original formula. The only unchanged aspect is that these novels are still written by, for ,and about women. There are more role-specific branches of this genre appearing daily. According to Yardley, the following offshoots emerged from the original Chick Lit formula:

“1) Chick Lit Mystery and Tart Noir; 2) Rise of the Antiheroine; 3) Small towns, Chick Lit style; 4) Mommy Lit; 5) Lady Lit or Hen Lit; 6) Widow Lit; 7) Bride Lit; 8) Full-figured Chick Lit; 9) Young Adult Chick Lit; 10) Lad Lit; 11) Paranormal Chick Lit; 12) Ethnic Chick Lit; 13) Christian Chick Lit; 14) Chick Lit Nonfiction” (Montoro, 12)

Thus, it can be said that there is a type of chick lit available for every woman.

I.6 Post-feminism:

Post-feminism, also written Postfeminism, is a controversial term with many contradictory definitions and disagreement over the origin of the term itself. According to Misha Kavka, Toril Moi coined the term in 1985 in *Sexual/Textual Politics* “to advocate a feminism that would deconstruct the binary between equality-based or “liberal” feminism and difference-based or “radical” feminism”. Alice claims that:

“Postfeminism; (usually written ‘post-feminism’) was coined in the period between the achievement of women’s suffrage in the U.S. and the rise of ‘second-wave’ feminism during the 1960s. It denoted the successful outcome of struggles by women for the right to vote, hold public office and the choice to occupy many more personal spheres.” (qtd.in Brooks, 2)

I.6.1 Contradictory Definitions of Post-feminism:

According to Stéphanie Genz and Benjamin Brabon, the debate over the definition of post-feminism is usually divided in two.

On one hand, post-feminism is viewed as a continuation or the new version of feminism, feminism in contemporary Western society. In this case, the ‘post’ in post-feminism does not signify a break from feminism but “a process of ongoing transformation” (4). It only means coming after the earlier versions of feminism, after the women’s liberation movement and the changes in society that it brought about. Moreover, it also refers to feminism’s intersection with other “post” philosophies and theories such as post-modernism, post-colonialism, and pos-structuralism.

On the other hand, post-feminism seems to suggest that the goals of feminism have been achieved, and therefore feminism is now irrelevant. Authors like Susan Faludi claim that post-feminism is a backlash against feminism and that women today do not seem to care about feminism (15). Angela McRobbie asserts that young women absorb sexist images without thinking. She evokes the ‘Hello Boys’ Wonderbra billboard advertisement of 1994. The aim of the advertisement was to depict women owning their sexuality and feeling liberated to the point of objectifying themselves which in turn makes it acceptable for men to view them as sexual objects. McRobbie argues that the billboard’s stance on sexual representation is a direct jab at the “feminist positions from the past in order to endorse a new regime of sexual meanings based on female consent, equality, participation and pleasure, free of politics”. She goes on to say that while young women appreciate the irony, they fail to adequately take up a feminist politics. In this way there seems to be generational divide between the old feminism and the new one (258-260).

Stéphanie Genz and Benjamin Brabon mention a third interpretation. A middle ground where there is “neither a simple and radical break . . . nor a straightforward continuity . . . it is both and neither”. They claim that it is redundant to offer a single definition of any ‘post’ expression. They go on to point out that feminism itself never had one universal definition which makes it an unreasonable standard for its offshoot (4). Thus, they conclude that there is not just one definition of post-feminism but rather a number of readings relative its context.

I.6.2 Backlash:

Backlash is a hostile reaction to or counter-assault on an idea or movement. Stéphanie Genz and Benjamin A. Brabon define feminist backlash as “anti-feminist and media-driven backlash characterized by a rejection of feminist goals and an attempt to turn the clock back to pre-feminist times”. They point out that there is always a backlash period that follows any “female/feminist advancement” starting with the postwar backlash against working women in the mid-twentieth-century. (52)

During World War II, women were encouraged by the media and government to fill the gap in the labor force and support the war effort; however, women’s employment was only encouraged as long as the war was on. Once the war was over, the wartime message “that women could simultaneously work and enjoy a family life” was reversed, and women were once again relegated to their homes. This backlash is what prompted the rise of second wave feminism, in the late 1960s and 1970s, which refers to women’s liberation movement for equal legal and social rights.

The second wave slogan ‘The personal is political’, sought to develop a shared consciousness of the oppression among women through consciousness-raising groups.

Women were encouraged to share their personal life experience in hopes of demonstrating that female experience was rooted in sex inequality. Betty Friedan was one of the leading figures of second wave feminism. In her book *The Feminist Mystique*, she sought to expose the myth of the 'happy housewife' which propagated the idea that women could find fulfillment only through childrearing and homemaking. Friedan viewed women as victims of false beliefs requiring them to build their lives around their husbands and children which caused women to lose their own identities in the process. The second wave came to end in the 1980s because of media backlash as well as inner divisions that were causing rifts within the women's movement and fracturing the communal ideal of sisterhood. The second wave was ripped by internal strains caused by its neglect of difference, first of class and color.

In her book *Backlash: The Undeclared War against Women*, Feminist writer Susan Faludi, argues that in the 1980s there was an anti-feminist backlash in the media that worked to undermine feminist goals and revoke the gains that the feminist movement has won for women. She asserts that the media worked to promote "right wing political ideology" and reshape a conservative version of femininity and domesticity. Moreover, the media also blamed feminism for causing many of the problems that plagued women in the 1980s, from burnout and infertility to depression and mental health problems. The main target of this campaign is the professional career woman who is shown to be coping with stress-induced illnesses such as hair loss and anxiety attacks induced by loneliness and a deep sense of unfulfilled needs.(53-54)

"Faludi outlines the backlash tenets that were propagated by a range of media texts in the 1980s and early 1990s and that are based on the assumption that female identity is troubled and tormented: Professional women are suffering 'burnout' and succumbing to an 'infertility epidemic'. Single women are grieving from a 'man short- age' . . . Childless women are

‘depressed and confused’ and their ranks are swelling . . . Unwed women are ‘hysterical’ and crumbling under a ‘profound crisis of confidence’ . . . High powered career women are stricken with unprecedented outbreaks of ‘stress-induced disorders’ . . . Independent women’s loneliness represents ‘a major mental health problem today’.” (qtd.in Genz et al,54)

Thus, feminism is portrayed as “women’s worst enemy” as women are set up to fail in their attempt to juggle job and family. Women must choose between feminine and feminist aspirations. The working woman can only achieve professional success at the cost of relationships and marriage resulting in an exhausting existence filled with pain and guilt. Working single women are cautioned that, unless they hurry and change their overly liberated lives, they are going to end up loveless and man-less. Wedded life and domesticity are promoted as a full and fulfilled existence. Unattached career women are depicted as “abject and deficient, selfish and emotionally stunted”; “a figure of evil” intended to discourage women from seeking public success and neglecting their feminine duties.

I.9 Conclusion:

As a summary, chick lit refers to works of fiction written by, for, and about women. Rooted within the consumer culture, chick differentiates from the romance genre through its prioritization of the professional life over the love life. The genre’s success has taken the world by storm in a relatively short period of time, caused much controversy, and quickly branched out into other fields. Post-feminism is a controversial term with multiple interpretations that are relative to its context. For the sake of this study, Post feminism needs to be situated in the 21st -century context that is characterized by capitalism, consumer society, and a decreased interest in politics and activism. Post-feminism will be interpreted as backlash against women’s equality.

Chapter Two:

Post-feminist Backlash in The Devil

Wears Prada (2003)

II.1 Introduction:

The Devil Wears Prada is considered by many to be one of the most iconic works of chick lit fiction. It is by far Lauren's Weisberger's most successful work. Largely inspired by Weisberger's personal experience working as a personal assistant for famous Vogue editor Anna Wintour, the novel attracted a lot of attention upon its publication. The novel is semi-biographical as it portrays exaggerated accounts of Weisberger's personal experience as a personal assistant. In this chapter, I will present the author Lauren Weisberger. Then, I will give an overview of the narrative. Finally, I will discuss how the novel reinforces the post-feminist notion of backlash.

II.2 Presenting the Author:

Lauren Weisberger was born on March 28, 1977, in Scranton, Pennsylvania, in a Jewish household. Her mother was a school teacher, and her father was a department store president turned mortgage broker. She grew up in Clarks Summit, Pennsylvania, a small town outside Scranton. Her parents got divorced when she was 11, and she and her younger sister, Dana, moved to Allentown with their mother.

In 1995, she graduated from Parkland High School where she was involved in intramural sports, some competitive sports, extra projects, and organizations. Lauren matriculated at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York, where she was an English major and a sorority member of Alpha Epsilon Phi. After graduating in 1999 with a BA in English, she went backpacking around the world, all over Europe, Israel, Egypt, Jordan, Thailand, India, Nepal, and Hong Kong. After returning to the U.S., she moved to Manhattan where she got her first job as the Assistant to the Editor-in-Chief of Vogue, Anna Wintour. After ten months, she left

along with features editor Richard Story and started working at Departures magazine, where she worked as an assistant editor and wrote 100-word reviews.

Soon after, she started taking writing classes at night, and began writing a story largely based on her hellish working for Anna Wintour.

The Devil Wears Prada was published in April 2003. It spent six months on the New York Times Best Seller List and was sold in thirty-four foreign countries. It was made into a major motion picture by 20th Century Fox in June 2006, starring Meryl Streep and Anne Hathaway. The huge success of Weisberger's debut novel is often attributed to the gossipy nature of the novel that was based on one of the most famous women in fashion, Ms. Wintour. Her short story "*The Bamboo Confessions*" was included in the anthology *American Girls about Town* which was published on July 5, 2004. In 2005, Weisberger published her second novel *Everyone Worth Knowing* which follows the trials and tribulations a young woman, Bette Robinson, as she works her way up in the world of the New York City public relations. The novel was heavily criticized, had disappointing sales and fell off the New York Times Best Sellers List in two weeks after debuting at No. 10. Her third novel *Chasing Harry Winston* was released on May 27, 2008. It tells the dramatic tale of three New Yorker best friends facing the horror of turning 30. This novel also faced huge criticism and *Entertainment Weekly* went as far as to vote it "#1 Worst Book of 2008". In August 2010, *Last Night at Chateau Marmont* was released. On September 5, 2010, it debuted at No. 9 on the *New York Times Bestseller List*. On June 4, 2013, the first sequel to *The Devil Wears Prada* entitled *Revenge Wears Prada* was released. It debuted at No. 3 on the *New York Times Bestseller List*. 2016 marked the release of *The Singles Game* which takes a look at the high stakes world of professional tennis. In 2018, the second sequel to *The Devil Wears Prada* entitled *When Life Gives You Lululemons* was released. It follows the character of Emily Charlton, Miranda Priestly's assistant.

Lauren Weisberger has been married to Mike Cohen since April 5, 2008. She currently lives in New York City with her husband and their two kids.

II.3 Overview of *The Devil Wears Prada*:

The Devil Wears Prada by Lauren Weisberger follows the story of Andrea Sachs, a small-town girl fresh out of college who aspires to write for *The New Yorker* one day. After graduating from Brown University and traveling Europe for the summer, Andrea moves to New York City with her best friend, Lily, and starts looking for a job. She is hired as a junior assistant for Miranda Priestly, editor-in-chief of the *Runway* magazine. Though Andrea does not know much about fashion and is not really interested to work as an assistant, she takes the job that "a million girls would die for" because she is told that if she manages to work for Miranda for a year and does well, Miranda will help her find get the position she wants in any magazine. When she meets Miranda Priestly for her interview, Andrea is awed by Miranda's grace and beauty. She admires how Miranda can command a room simply by entering it.

Andrea's family, her best friend and Alex, her boyfriend of three years, are all very happy that she is one step closer to her dream of being a writer for *The New Yorker*. They are all supportive and help her get ready to start her new job. During Andrea's first few days at *Runway* Miranda is on vacation. During that time she is trained by Emily, her co-assistant; she learns how things in the office are run, how to perform her duties, and to anticipate Miranda's wishes. Her training days are long, hectic, and stressful, but Andrea feels confident that she is can handle working for Miranda. However, Andrea is soon disillusioned as she faces the nightmare that is working for Miranda Priestly. Miranda who had a very poor background climbed her way up to the top through hard work and sacrifice is very controlling

and demands perfection from her staff. Andrea learns that there is almost no pleasing her boss as Miranda complains constantly that everything is not perfect.

Working for Miranda is a hellish experience. Miranda makes the most ridiculous demands and expects Andrea to be at her beck and call at all times. Andrea is constantly running back and forth to the coffee shop so that Miranda's breakfasts will be hot whenever she chooses to arrive in the morning. She is often charged with helping Miranda's twin daughters with their homework and picking them up from school. At one point, she is even given the impossible task of getting the twins a prepublication copy of the Harry Potter novel. Even so, Andrea is hell-bent on lasting a whole year and accomplishing all of Miranda's impossible tasks for the sake of her dream. Andrea becomes so absorbed by her job that she begins to neglect her boyfriend and best friend. Alex starts to question her commitment to their relationship while Lily slowly sinks into alcoholism. Even her family members express their concern and dislike of her job. Things come at a head when Andrea decides to travel to Paris with Miranda for Fashion Week., and Alex breaks up with her. Andrea is heartbroken, but the end of her year working for Miranda is close to the end. Andrea is not willing to let all of her hard work go down the drain. While in Paris Andrea meets up again with Christian Collinsworth, an attractive writer she met in New York. They spend an evening together, but Andrea cannot stop thinking about Alex. When she returns to the hotel, Andrea gets urgent calls from Alex and her parents and learns that Lily has been in an accident and is in a comatose state. Her family and Alex urge her to return home, but she is afraid of being if she leaves Paris Miranda. Andrea informs Miranda of her friend's condition and reassures her that she will honor her commitment to Runway. Miranda is pleased that Andrea has made the right decision and tells Andrea that she reminds her of herself when she was younger. Andrea is taken aback by this statement. To her horror she realizes that she is truly becoming the woman she has detested working for almost a year. When Miranda has another unwarranted

tirade, Andrea snaps and curses her. She is fired on the spot and returns home to reconnect with friends and family. Her relationship with Alex is unsalvageable, but they still remain close friends. Lily awakes by the time Andrea gets back home and she soon recovers. She is lucky to receive only alcohol counseling and community service for her DWI charge.

In the end, Andrea and Lily move in with Andrea's parents for a few months while Lily recuperates from her injuries. She starts writing a short fiction and finances her unemployment with profits made from reselling the designer clothing she was provided for her Paris trip. Andrea is pleasantly surprised when her story is purchased by Seventeen Magazine. Writing is what she has always dreamed of and despite the fact that she is not writing for *The New Yorker* yet, she feels one step closer to her dream. She is confident to accomplish her dreams on her own.

II.4 Post-feminism and *The Devil Wears Prada*:

The Devil Wears Prada reinforces the Post-feminist notions of backlash against women. The novel supports the post-feminist idea that women have to choose between their professional and personal life. Unlike their male counterparts, women cannot find a correct balance between the two. Therefore, there are two types of women: one that is committed to her job but is ultimately dissatisfied with it and another that is successful but fails in her personal life. Moreover, the novel depicts the post-feminist notion of consumerism.

Andrea Sachs, the novel's protagonist, represents the first type. She is portrayed as a very ambitious and hard-working character. Throughout the novel, she does her best to keep up with her boss's demanding tasks and put up with her demeaning treatment. She prioritizes her job over her personal life. However, the more she advances in her job, the more distant she

becomes from her family and friends. Her job is depicted as demeaning and destructive, but Andrea wants to succeed in her job and win her boss's approval that she sacrifices relationships with people who are important to her to constantly be at her boss's beck and call. Her relationship with her boyfriend, Alex, becomes strenuous as he starts to question her commitment to their relationship. Her personal life begins to crumble because of she spends too much time working. Her family is disappointed because they have not seen her in months. She fails to support her best friend, Lily, who is an alcoholic and ends up in an accident, and her boyfriend breaks up with her. Hence, the story seems to suggest that women who pursue a professional career have to sacrifice their personal life, and that having too much ambition destroys women's chance at love. In this fashion, gender assumptions that women too weak to endure the pressure of a career are reinforced. Women do not have fortitude to withstand the trials of a career. Andrea is a constant state of stress and exhaustion. She feels lonely and isolated. In the end, Charlie crumples under the pressure; she yells at her boss and gets fired.

Miranda Priestley, Andrea's boss and editor in chief of Runway Magazine, represents the second type of women. Miranda is picture of as the successful professional woman; however, she is portrayed as a cold hearted, self-obsessed, manipulative, immoral villainess. She is ready to do whatever it takes to be on the top including sacrificing her personal life. She may be successful but her personal life is a wreck. She is on her third marriage and her twin daughters are raised by a slew of nannies. She distances herself from her family as she delegates her familial responsibilities to her assistants. Andrea is often charged with helping the twins with their homework and picking them up from school. Miranda abuses her power with her constant and ridiculous demands. In addition to taking care of the twins, Andrea is charged of getting them a prepublication copy of the latest copy of *Harry Potter* novel, and she is constantly running back and forth to the coffee shop so that Miranda's breakfasts will be hot whenever she chooses to arrive in the morning. The novel critiques the way Miranda

turns Andrea into a personal slave while she complains endlessly when everything is not perfect. Hence, the successful career woman is dehumanized. In her quest for success she loses her femininity and compassion. The novel seems to be a cautionary tale about the dangers of women's career success, unrestrained female ambition and the negative consequences of women to holding power.

Furthermore, the novel depicts the post-feminist notion of consumer culture. In consumer society, the possession of material goods is a requirement and indicative of success. This material focus is especially reflected through Miranda's character. Miranda leads an expensive lifestyle that showcases her place in society. Throughout the novel, Miranda is shown to only possess and purchase famous brand items such as her signature Hermès scarf that she wears everywhere. These famous brands are symbols of her wealth and status. Not only are they expensive, but Miranda purchases excessively. There is a passage in the book where she purchased an entire stock of five hundred Hermès scarves because she was afraid they would go out of stock. However, by the end of the year only two hundred were left because Miranda just discards them carelessly even though each one costs over a hundred dollars. Moreover, Miranda is constantly spending money on vacations all over the world and first-class plane tickets. Miranda indulges in the luxuries her status affords her. Further, is frequently hosting very expensive and extravagant parties and inviting many rich and famous people to them to impress them and show off her wealth and power. Thus, Miranda appears to be a very shallow woman who luxuriates in her material possessions. It seems as though she is trying to overshadow her failing personal life by projecting this glamorous façade, or perhaps she is trying to achieve personal fulfillment through her possessions.

The novel showcases the backlash that women are subjected to in the western society today. Women are depicted as unfit to balance their personal life and professional life. The woman who prioritizes her personal life fails in her career. The successful professional

woman is a villainess that sacrifices her personal life. Moreover, they are portrayed as very shallow and obsessed with material goods. Thus, it becomes clear that the novel reestablishes old patriarchal beliefs about women, love and power.

II.5 Conclusion:

The Devil Wears Prada reinforces the notion of post-feminist backlash. Through the characters of Andrea and Miranda, it seems as though the professional woman is doomed to fail. If she prioritizes her family life she feels unsatisfied with her job, and if she is successful at her job she seems loses a part of her soul. Moreover, women in power are depicted as abusive and villainous. Thus, the novel reinforces the patriarchal vision that women are just not fit for the burden of professional life. Furthermore, post-feminist backlash is further reaffirmed through depiction of people's obsession with material goods.

Chapter Three:

Post-feminist Backlash in *The Singles*

Game (2016)

III.1 Introduction:

The Singles Game does not follow the generic chick lit formula. Instead it is part of the sports subgenre. The novel explores the world of sports through the Charlotte Silver, a professional tennis player. Lauren Weisberger is definitely not a professional tennis player; however, she started playing tennis casually since she was of four. In an interview with nctv17, weisberger discussed the research she made before writing the book. About six months before she started writing, Weisberger attended tournaments in Charleston, Miami, Connecticut, Wimbledon, and the US open. She was able to observe the player behind the scenes in the player's lounge, player dining. She claims that she was able to a clear picture of the player's lives off court. She talked with the players and got a lot of insight of their lives. She discovered how demanding the life of tennis player is traveling ten and a half months a year. Maintaining any kind of relationship is nearly impossible. Moreover, she discovered how women in this field felt the added pressure of the expectation how they look on and off court. She went on to express that she wanted to expose all of these hidden truths to be in her work. In this chapter, I will discuss how the novel reinforces post-feminist backlash.

III.2 Overview of the Plot:

The Singles Game tells the story Charlotte "Charlie" Silver, a 24-year-old tennis pro who has set her sights on winning her first Grand Slam tournament. Charlotte has always been a sweet, clean-cut girl with her ribbon woven braid. She started playing tennis at a very early age and excelled at it. Her father, a former player himself, taught her everything he knew about tennis and soon she became one of the top juniors in the world. As she pursued her dream, she had to make many sacrifices along the way. She left UCLA and broke her

longtime boyfriend's heart to join the world's best athletes who travel eleven months a year. However, despite all her sacrifices, the best she is ever ranked was 23 in the world.

After Charlie suffers a terrible injury at Wimbledon's Centre Court, she disappears from the tennis world for a few months. While doing physical rehab, Charlie decides that it is time to make some changes in her life to get the top of her game. She fires her longtime coach, Marcy, and hires Todd Feltner, a celebrity in men's tennis with a reputation for bringing players back from injury and addiction to play even better than ever. He is also well known for his toughness, strictness, and borderline abusive behavior. Charlie is the first female player he agrees to coach and he wants to do an entire revamp of her image, her diet, and even her training. He is set on turning Charlie's public image into a "warrior princess", a ruthless competitor who will win matches by all means possible. Moreover, he overhauls her training methods and hires a full-time male hitting partner, Dan, for her.

Charlie's casual hookups with the number one male tennis player in the world, attractive Spaniard Marco Vallejo, are soon noticed by her coach. He instructs her to make her secret dalliances with Marco public to increase her popularity and to be a media darling. Her new image soon garners her lot of attention from the media as well as the opposite sex, and Charlie's ascension to the social throne parallels her rising rank on the women's tour.

However, Charlie soon buckles under the pressure and loneliness of life on the road. She starts making some astounding poor choices that derail her promising career: She wins the Charleston Open using unsportsmanlike conduct. Her relationship with Marco turns into a scandal when they are both caught cheating. The night before a big tournament, she attends a party and mistakenly smokes marijuana and ultimately fails a drug test. Things only go downhill from there as more drama unfolds. Her father, who has been non-committal with women ever since her mom died, is now about to marry her mom's best friend. Her brother,

who is gay, has hooked up with her nemesis Natalya's football-playing boyfriend. Charlie begins to feel less and less comfortable with the direction she has taken especially when she senses that her father is disappointed with some of her off-court antics. As she spends more time with Dan and Marco, Charlie is forced to realize that her relationship with Marco is purely physical and for the sake of appearances.

Finally, she decides that it is time to end both her relationship with Marco and her coach Todd after she ends up losing to Natalya in the Wimbledon grand slam. She is disappointed by her loss but still satisfied with and proud of her performance. In the last chapter, Charlie, now number-two ranked in the world, announces that she will retire in a year's time. She feels that she has achieved on.

III.3 Sports, Women, and Media:

Since the turn of the nineteenth century, women have made tremendous inroads in the world of sports. Today, women can compete in professional sports which were once the vestige of male domination. However, even though there have been groundbreaking achievements that granted recognition to women's ability to be professional athletes, women's participation is still very much restricted on several levels. Even though women can now compete in the Olympics they are still restricted in terms of events they are allowed to compete in and even clothes are allowed to wear.

Moreover, despite the growing number of female athletes and women's sporting events, the media's coverage is still very low. According to the statistics on the UNESCO website, Women represent 40% of all participants in sports while they only receive 4% of sports media coverage. This lack of media coverage causes sportswomen to lose sponsors, fans, and financial support. This media underrepresentation minimizes their chances of achieving

sponsorship deals. Women's sport has been an afterthought when it comes to sponsorships. Moreover, Boyle et al argue that the lack of coverage leads to a lack of female sports role models that inspire girls to pursue sports and this ultimately undermines women's sports as a whole:

“...sports which fail to attract exposure find difficulty in getting sponsors on board, which in turn make it less likely that ‘stars’ will be created and given the media exposure which generates the accompanying lucrative endorsement portfolio”. (Boyle et al, 125)

This dilemma particularly concerns female athletes in sports which do not always enjoy the high media profile. These sportswomen struggle to attract media attention. British female boxer Cathy Brown argues that unlike their male counterparts women's sports do not get media coverage based their performance alone but rather based on their attractiveness and willingness to show skin:

“Women are pressurized into doing sexy media shots and dressing in a way that will encourage media attention and make them more appealing to the male eye (men constitute the majority of sporting audiences, we cannot get media coverage simply because we are brilliant at our sport. [. . .] Anna Kournikova, who in all honesty was not great at her sport, managed to get sponsorship. Why? Because she is beautiful, sexy, and prepared to show half-naked images of herself.” (qtd in Boyle et al, 129)

Thus, “playing the image game” becomes a necessary way of managing media profiles to increase earning capacity for female athletes from sports who do not enjoy a high media profile. The case of British sprint track cycling world champion Victoria Pendleton illustrates the lengths that these women have to go to achieve media recognition. Despite an immensely

successful career and scoring multiple gold medals, Pendleton struggled to gain the attention of mainstream media. She needed to play ‘the image game’ through a set of promotional glamour shots and she then appeared naked on her bike for the front cover of the Observer Sports Magazine to attain a mainstream media profile. (Boyle et al, 131)

Sexism in sport is propagated through media coverage. Stereotypical representations of the genders are framed by the sports media more than any other domain. Sportswomen are viewed as women first and athletes second. Unlike their male counterparts, media coverage focuses on women’s appearance rather than performance. Much of the discussion revolves around their clothes, age, and family life. Moreover, media attention tends to be focused on the more attractive and feminine women. Sportswomen need to show themselves as domestic or sexual objects to reaffirm their femininity because sportswomen described as attractive are perceived more positively. Sportswomen are often subject to body shaming for looking too masculine. While male physical strength and musculature are celebrated, female musculature is often viewed as distasteful and monstrous.

Even today women still struggle to establish themselves in the sporting world not just athletes but also coaches, administrators, or sports journalists. Women who seek a career in professional sport face more obstacles than their male counterparts. Although there is an abundance of sportswomen, there is a serious lack of representation of these women and sports in the media. Women’s sports are under promoted and underfunded. Women are pressurized into selling aspects of their sexuality. Their performance comes second to appearances. The idea of women being actively involved in sport remains largely unacceptable in the male-dominated sports industry.

III.4 Discussion:

The representation of women in the novel sheds light on the backlash that women face in the western society today. Under patriarchy, society still believes in binary categorization, i.e., the division of people into men and women. Women are still viewed as inferior to men especially in sports. They are judged by and valued based on their appearance. They have control over their sexuality. Unmarried women are in constant hunt for the right man because they are pressured by biological clock. They are in constant fear and anxiety about the future. They struggle and mostly fail to find a balance between their professional and personal lives.

The novel showcases the renewed focus on the female body in sports world. Sportswomen are objectified and judged based on their appearance rather than their performance. From the very beginning of the novel, one of the first steps Todd, Charlie's new male coach, takes to help her climb up the ranks of tennis is an image overhaul. He hires a stylist that helps her look more attractive and feminine. This allows Charlie to gain more media coverage and gain new sponsor Swarovski. Sportswomen are pressurized to use their attractiveness to gain media attention and recognition. Charlie takes advantage of her looks to advance in media and sports. This just shows that in the male dominated world of sports, women have to rely on their looks, not just performance to get attention and to appeal to male dominated audience. Moreover, during interviews, much of the discussion is directed towards her clothes and looks rather than her training, performance, or the sport itself. Moreover sportswomen are pushed to act and look more feminine and soft. Muscular women are viewed negatively or very stereotypically as gay. Karina Geiger, one of Charlie's rivals, who is strong tennis player characterized by her big built and muscled is described negatively. She is compared to a refrigerator and called "Giant German". She is also described as violent and is not very much liked by the media. This emphasizes the fact that while female softness and attractiveness is

welcome and celebrated, strength and musculature are shamed and associated with violence and bad temper. Moreover, she is homosexual which is very stereotypical. The message seems to be that straight women cannot be strong and muscular. Natalya Ivanov, Charlie's nemesis and ranked number one tennis player, is a character that flaunts her femininity by wearing skimpy outfits and her excessive show of skin. While she portrayed as an evil character that makes the protagonist's life miserable, she is shown to be very popular and liked by the media and men in general. She is a successful woman who takes advantage of her body and attractiveness to get to the top.

The theme of Sexual freedom and sexual liberation of women is recurrent throughout the novel. Charlie is portrayed as modern sexually liberated woman. Although she did not have many sexual experiences before she became a professional tennis player, once she started traveling eleven month a year for tournaments she became very familiar with casual hookups and one night stands with fellow tennis players. Moreover, she uses her sex life to her advantage and gain the attention of media. Her casual relationship with Marco Vallejo becomes public for the sake media; however, it is only for appearances as he is clearly not committed to the relationship. While Charlie seems to take the relationship seriously, she ends up cheating on him when she has a one nightstand with world renowned actor Zeke Leighton. Charlie does not have any shame in her promiscuousness. In fact she is very proud of her conquests and brags about it to her friends and even in an interview. Although not entirely intentional Charlie ends up taking advantage of the scandal as she gains more media attention and approval.

Women's control of their sexuality may be celebrated; however, the novel also reinforces old idea about women and love. It is clear that the female characters in the novel are desperate to find love and settle down. Charlie tries to make herself agreeable to be casual relationships and just indulge herself in physical pleasure, but she seems desperate to establish a serious

relationship. She is very envious of her friends who are in serious relationships and claim to be in love. Whenever the subject of marriage and love come up in a conversation she becomes upset. Charlie is so desperate for love and male attention that she turns a blind eye to many of Marco's flaws and insensitive actions. She does not seem to notice the horrible way he treats people around him including her friends. She pretends she does not care when openly flirts with other women, and feigns indifference when she learns he is sleeping with other women. However, she is deeply hurt and feels humiliated by each of his actions. Throughout their relationship, she tries to behave in ways that appeal to him and ultimately she feels like she is acting like a different person and that makes her miserable.

In the novel, the female characters struggle and mostly fail to find a balance between their professional and personal lives. From the very beginning of the story, it is established that Charlie sacrificed her personal life in the pursuit of her tennis career. Tennis is a very demanding sport that requires professional players to travel around the world for ten and a half months of the year. This makes very hard for anyone to maintain a romantic relationship. However, Charlie still chooses this path. She does not have a boyfriend and cannot spend much time with her friends or even her family. Charlie becomes very lonely and miserable, and soon she realizes that she does not enjoy this lifestyle; she does not feel fulfilled by it. Her friends and family constantly suggest that she should quit because they can see clearly that she is not enjoying it in the least. In this fashion, the novel reinforces the post feminist belief that career woman cannot reach true happiness and fulfillment. Women who prioritize their career are portrayed as miserable and filled with regret because they cannot take the pressure of a career. Charlie is constantly anxious and stressed because of the completions. Her work puts her in a constant state of anxiety. In the end, she decides to retire after a year so that she can have a personal life again. Women are made to look as inseparable of dealing with the pressure of such a job. On the other hand, Marcy, Charlotte's old coach, fails at her

job because she prioritizes her personal life. She ends up making very big mistakes; she fails to notice that Charlotte's shoes violate the dress code. Charlotte ends up wearing ill fitted shoes that ultimately lead to her injuring her ankle and wrist. Marcy's oversight is due to the fact that she was spending time with her husband which just goes to show how her personal life interferes with her work. Moreover, she is trying to have a baby which makes it hard for her travel. Charlie ends up firing her because she feels Marcy is not committed to her job. Hence, women's desire for a stable family life is shown as a deterrent to their job. Women who try to commit and maintain a healthy relationship cannot keep up with their work.

The Singles Game reinforces the notions of post-feminist backlash. The renewed focus on the female body, sexual freedom, women's desire for love and domesticity, the characters display anxiety over how to incorporate feminine paths into their lives, and the conflict between personal and professional live which are fundamental elements Backlash prevail throughout the novel.

III.5 Conclusion:

The Singles Game reinforces the notion of post-feminist backlash. In the novel, there is a clear focus on the female body. The women depicted are objectified and pressurized to use their body and sexuality to advance in their field. Sexist undertones prevail throughout the novel. Furthermore, Patriarchal views about women's desire for love and domesticity are supported by the constant anxiety and stress that the characters suffer because of their profession.

General Conclusion

General Conclusion:

To conclude, this thesis has explored how post-feminist notions of backlash are subtly reinforced in both of *The Devil Wears Prada* and *The Singles Game* by Lauren Weisberger. Although both narratives seem to depict strong independent women at the top of their fields at a surface level, the underlying message rather supports patriarchal views on the position of women in society.

In both narratives, the female characters struggle and mostly fail to find a balance between their personal and professional lives. Unlike their male counterparts, women have to choose between the two. There are two types of professional women depicted in the novels: one that is committed to her job but is ultimately dissatisfied with it and another that is successful but fails in her personal life. The successful career woman is depicted as a villainess, and the women who prioritize their family life over their career ultimately fail at it. Moreover, the career woman is depicted in a constant state of stress and anxiety. Thus, these novels imply that unlike their men women do not seem to have the fortitude for a professional career, and that for women to lead happy, fulfilled lives they should opt for a more domestic lifestyle.

Moreover, *The Singles Game* exposes the renewed focus on the female body and women's desperation to find man and settle down. While the narrative may seem to celebrate women's freedom to choose to objectify themselves and take advantage of their bodies and sexuality, it rather exposes the underlying sexism that still prevails in western society. Even in sports, women are judged based on their appearances before their performance. There exists a double standard that gives attractive women an advantage over unattractive women. Thus, women are rather pressured to use their bodies and sexuality to advance. Moreover, while the women are depicted as independent and sexually liberated, they seem to be desperate for male attention.

Furthermore, *The Devil Prada* is rooted within the consumer culture which is fundamental component of post-feminist backlash. The novel denounces the worship of material goods, the very shallow representation of the characters.

Lastly, The fact that chick lit does generally reinforce the post-feminism notions of backlash does not necessarily mean that these chick lit novels are anti-feminist. They rather expose the patriarchal notions that still prevail within modern western society by depicting a realistic image of their society.

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