

I. Introduction to McMillan's *Waiting to Exhale*

The present research entitled "Intersection of Racial and Sexual Tension in McMillan's *Waiting to Exhale* (1992), highlights the conflict and resistance of four African American women for their rights (pursuit of happiness) with contemporary society and black culture. We can see conflict between man and women in the novel, these African American women searching for identity, empowerment, and love in their life. The novel shows how the racial discrimination between whites and Non-whites, affect the lives of the black people. It also shows the black male imitation of whites values in the novel. McMillan's *Waiting to Exhale*, a story based on the lives of four African-American living in the Phoenix-Arizona-Savannah, Bernadine, Robin and Gloria—who go through different stages of love, life and sex. *Waiting to Exhale* aims to address the African American women's experience with the dialectical tension between personal and professional life. McMillan tells stories of Savannah and Robin in first person whereas Bernadine and Gloria are in very revealing third person. Inspecting through the spectacles of race and gender studies, this project focuses on the major incidents of the text to observe the negative impacts of racism and gender; especially on these four African-American women. Bernadine husband John leaves her for a white woman Kathleen, who was bookkeeper at his company where he sells computer. John unhesitatingly said Bernadine "I've filed for a divorce because I want to marry Kathleen" (32). Like this way other characters are also victimized by race. Moreover, the thesis highlights the theme of Gender and Race, which helps to bring the dramatic changes in the novel.

This research study is based on the secondary sources; it follows the idea of Paul Gilroy, Gretchen Gerzina, and Paul S. Reinch. The other writer such as Zora Neale Hurston, W.E.B Dubois and their related ideas are also incorporated in this

research. The novel portrays that these women are being enslaved by men and white culture; although they are willing to make their own choice but they don't want to be their puppet. It shows how men use white folks to reinforce and legitimate oppression of woman and how women use them to fight against a subservient role and try to assert their power against men. These women choose the path of self-dependency, so they revolt against such stereotypical images of putting female under pressure of men.

For example:

Bernadine starts catering business; Bernadine didn't want to be bothered. She'd had a better dream. One that would see the light since these white folks were making a fortune selling those damn chocolate chip cookies, she'd open up her own little shop. Sell nothing but sweets, the kind black folks are: blackberry cobbler, peach cobbler, sweet potato pie bread pudding, banana pudding, rice pudding, lemon meringue pie, and pound cake. She'd put it in the biggest mall in Scottsdale. Serve the finest gourmet coffee. She could find: cappuccino and all those other ridiculous coffees everybody couldn't like without these days. She already had the name picked Bernadine's sweet tooth. That sounded good. Yeah, she thought. It's got a real nice to ring to it.

(432)

This shows that women also can be more powerful like that of man. Bernadine husband John always insisted her to open catering business saying it was too risky but she becomes able to open it. Her dream of opening catering business is fulfilled.

This research hypothesizes that these characters break free from the trap of stereotypical representation i. e. putting females under the pressure of males. Racism is a system belief a set of implicit assumption about the superiority of one's own race or ethnic group. Racism can be defined as discrimination made by people on the basis of race, color and religion where discrimination is the product of prejudice and stereotypical mode of thought or assumption mainly based on race and color. Paul Gilroy defined racism as:” Racism takes new shape due to interference of different social political and cultural institutions in course of time and instead of following a notion of singularity, it encompasses diverse scholarly ideas which has been shaped and determined by several politics (248). Racist ideologies and practice have distinct meanings bounded by historical circumstances and determined in struggle. Gilroy says that race is determined with social and political matter, racist ideologies have distinct meanings.

Waiting to Exhale is a novel about four African-American professional women. These women were in search for ‘right man’. The relationship between these four women become a sisterhood, they share sorrows, pain, romance, suffering to each other. Savannah Jackson is a successful television producer and PR in Gas Company. She keeps relation with more than six men but she doesn't like any of them. We can say she is suffering from dialectical problem of professional and personal life:

I want a man to go out of his way for me. It would be nice to meet one who and that it takes more than a stiff dick to keep woman happy. But most of the ones I've met have a clue. I wish I could tell some of them that they should start by checking the dictionary under F for “foreplay”, G for “gentle”, and T for “Tender or take your time. (5)

Another character Bernadine is betrayed by her husband John; he keeps relation with white girl named Kathleen who was book keeper at his company where he sells computer software. Bernadine is interested to open catering business but John refused it claiming it was just too risky. He wants to divorce her after eleven years of their marriage. Robin stroke is high powered executive and mistress of married man Russell. Robin was a Zany, optimistic about everything and she talked a mile a minute. She didn't have drop of class, no sense of style, but it was clear that tried hard. Gloria Matthew is a bit old than these three woman she has one son named Tarik. She is more tensed about her son because he started to take drug, she leaves her husband, and she falls in love with a new neighbor. She wanted to be a good mother, wanted to expose Tarik to as many different kinds of cultural activities.

Terry McMillan, a famous Afro-American writer, was born in Port Huron, Michigan, who is a versatile in her writing. She writes in different genres of literary creation. She is one of the prolific American writers, whose work finds their way into college and university syllabi. She published her first novel, *Mama*, in 1987. Her second novel *Disappearing Acts* was published in 1989. Her third novel is *Waiting to Exhale*, published two years later, was adapted into a popular Hollywood film in 1995. McMillan's fourth novel is, *How Stella Got Her Groove Back*.

McMillan, a famous African woman writer mainly writes novel which are about black characters. She mainly raises the issues of gender and race of the contemporary society, the same subject matter found in the novel *Waiting to Exhale*. By the help of the characters she shows the condition of the African American women struggling to be successful in their life. One of the respected critics Rogers, Elice said that McMillan holds a prominent place because of the immense popularity she

commands as a novelist of human predicament of sex, racism in the insensitive and inconsiderate contemporary world. He shows his claim with the following words:

Scholars have addressed adults and the impact of popular culture on adult learning, but little attention has been directed toward the relationship between adult learning and African Americans. Most specifically, minimal information is related to adult learning that evolves as a result of popular culture influences. Popular culture promotes cultures of learning and teaches and facilitates a more informed literate citizenry. As a form of popular culture, novel informs adults about race, class, and gender issues. The novel, "*Waiting to Exhale*," challenges adult readers to think critically about race, class, and gender experiences as they occur in the social context. It explores the complex themes of race, class, and gender and the quest for loving adult relationships amid the struggle to be successful African American women. African American women are given an opportunity to see themselves "in the picture" and to be viewed by others as their own vibrant, complex, and independent beings. (12)

The above cited words by Elice claims that the novel informs about race, class, and gender of African American lifestyle. It challenges the adult readers to think critically about race and gender and shows the real problem of African American women.

Another highly respected critic Daniel Max commented McMillan's novels as best-selling novel in New York Times. He talks about her novel in the following words:

Of course, black authors have been a fixture on the literary landscape for decades, but the majority of their books have been consciously

literary efforts, or novels in which ideology is at least as important as character development and plot. Readers of these books have been -- or were thought to have been -- whites and a small group of black intellectuals. McMillan, by contrast, writes about the lives of essentially conventional blacks, who have up to now received little attention. Her success has opened publishers' eyes to a growing black middle-class readership Clara Villarosa, the owner of Hue-Man Experience Bookstore in Denver, says: "The people who bought '*Waiting to Exhale*' I felt were women who really identified with the characters. They don't consider her like an Alice Walker or a Toni Morrison. She's writing more about their experience. (29)

Max claims that she has raised the voices of black characters. She writes the lives of essentially conventional black people about the real experience of their life.

Like previous critics, France Stead Sellers talk about popularity of her novel. It shows the life style of educated black women and their real problem:

Terry McMillan's novel, *Waiting to Exhale*, raced up the *New York Times* bestseller lists immediately after its publication in the United states. Most black women writers are associated with a recognizable tradition of serious, ideologically inspired black literature, written primarily for "concerned" whites and black intellectual. Written for and about educated black women, *Waiting to Exhale* reflects the growing numbers of successful African-Americans women. McMillan's characters believe in black solidarity. To act like a white is an act of betrayal. "White folks" hover disconcertingly on the novel's margins. *Waiting to Exhale*'s four protagonists live in Phoenix, Arizona. Apart

from being black, female and thirty something, they have one thing in common: "None of us have a man." And they're holding their breath until they get one. Savannah wants to feel "important to somebody," though she's not yet desperate: she's just "thirsty," not "dehydrated." Bernadine has been betrayed by her acquisitive husband, who traded her in for a new trophy-wife, his twenty-four-year-old (blonde) book-keeper. Gloria has given up waiting for a man who can make her toes curl and takes comfort in God, her hair salon, a promiscuous adolescent son and much too much food. But its literary merits are modest. (20)

Like previous critics, sellers too talk about popularity of her work. McMillan's portrayal of women is more sympathetic, but it is equally shallow. McMillan's generalized male bashing has understandably alienated some black men. The attention she draws to male-female rifts within the African-American community seems at odds with the solidarity otherwise implicitly approves. Her novel reflects the growing numbers of successful African American women. He claims that she has raised the issues of racism in the novel and she shows the lifestyle of black middle class family.

McMillan mainly shows the life style of middle class African American women. In this novel too she shows the struggle of four African American women. In *publisher Weekly*, the critic offers praise for *Waiting to Exhale*:

A racy, zesty, irreverent and absorbing book with broad mainstream appeal, McMillan's third novel (after *Mama* and *Disappearing Acts*) tells the stories of four 30ish black women bound together in warm, supportive friendship and in their dwindling hopes of finding Mr. Right. All are independent, upwardly mobile and "*Waiting to*

Exhale"—to stop holding their breaths waiting for the proper mate to come along. Bernadine is married, but her husband walks out on her for a white woman as the novel opens. They also share speech patterns that some readers may find disconcerting: they utter profanities with panache, unceasingly. Indeed, the novel's major drawback may be the number of times such words as shit, fuck and ass are repeated on every page. There's nothing stereotyped in her work here: it is fresh and engaging. (58)

The critic in *Publisher Weekly* praises for McMillan's *Waiting to Exhale* as best book that shows the real problem of real people. McMillan's novel shows the problems of middle class professional women and their relationship with their life partners and so on. It shows that after many vicissitudes, two of the heroines find love, but until then McMillan keeps us constantly guessing about which members of her lively quartet will be thus rewarded. These women have a healthy interest in sex, while deploring the fact that most of the men they meet are arrogant, irresponsible and chronically unfaithful. Each character is drawn with authenticity and empathy.

Paula C. Barnes in *Belles Letters*, offers praise for *Waiting to Exhale*, which she describes as an important book that the problems of real women in the real world.

It tells the story of four African-American women:

Waiting to Exhale addresses the dilemma of career women who want it all. Career advancement, relocation, divorce, aging parents, illness, single parenthood, and the never ending search for love are the problems these women face and the issues McMillan explores. Yet her real purpose soon becomes clear—to sensitize readers to the real-

life problems, and the need for individual, communal and governmental action. McMillan's work match the caliber of Toni Morrison's, Alice Walker's, Gloria Naylor's, or Zora Neale Hurston's. *Waiting to Exhale* is an important book as it traces the problems of "real" women in a real world. McMillan has created a series of portraits that reveal the resiliency of the black career woman. *Waiting to Exhale* is refreshingly funny, but its message is hard-hitting—in the end, one must learn to depend on one's self for love and happiness. (57)

The words by Paula C. Barnes clearly expose the real problem of black women. She traces that the author real purpose is to sensitize readers to the real life problems such as divorce, relocation etc. She shows the life style of black career women.

Donella Canty in English Journal commented for McMillan works in this way:

Waiting to Exhale quickly established McMillan as a major force among contemporary female fiction writers. The novel lived up to the praises of my colleagues and turned out to be one of the most well written, true-to-life books I had ever read. McMillan's story-telling strategies and precise command of narrative voice were exceptional. The plot centers around four thirty something friends. *Waiting to Exhale* speaks to most women and to the issues surrounding most women, regardless of race. She portrays women as complete, complex, undiminished human beings. *Waiting to Exhale* provides a brief glimpse into the talent and capabilities of Terry McMillan. I am making room on my bookshelf and waiting to inhale her next masterpiece. (57)

The above cited words by Donnell Canty talked about the popularity of McMillan Novel. This novel quickly establishes McMillan as a major force among contemporary female writers (Alice Walker and Tony Morrison). The black dialect and voices that writer has uses to tell women stories draw the readers into black culture. She shows these African American women are suffering from dual problem of personal and professional life such as divorce, marriage etc. She portrays women as complete, complex and undiminished human beings.

Many critics compare her work close to Tony Morrison, Alice Walker. She shows the real problem of black women. Faye A. Chadwell commented her novel as best novel and offers praise for her work:

Like McMillan's previous novels, *Disappearing Acts* and *Mama* her new effort features a predictable plot, prose that often falls flat, and a narrative that lacks depth. Four African American women living in Phoenix devote most of their energies to searching for the one good black man who will make their dreams of the perfect partner and lover come true. Unsurprisingly, Savannah, Bernie, Gloria, and Robin all kiss several toads, but their trials and errors never arouse much interest. Far stronger is the author's sharp, often humorous depiction of the strong bonds among the four friends, their relationships with their families, and tans their community activities readers will regret that McMillan did not develop these areas further. (20)

Chadwell claims that like her previous novel this novel too have predictable plot and it revolves around the lifecycle of four African American women. These women are searching for good black male. Some of the dialogue she has presented is quite humorous. He claims that she doesn't write novel in broad level.

Taking the above mentioned events and circumstances into considerations the researchers attempts in the present research has been directed towards exploring and justifying from the prospective of gender and race associating it with Paul Gilroy and other black theorists related with race and gender, who brings the issue of black and gender in the American society. The novel mainly portrays the life cycle of the black characters, who are seeking for happiness and satisfaction in their life specially in love but couldn't achieve it.

The present research work has been divided into three chapters. First chapter presents outline of present research itself. It gives the bird's eye view of the entire thesis. The second chapter deals with textual analysis and the theories related with Gender and race. It covers the idea of Paul Gilroy, Paul S. Reinch, Zora Neal Hurston, etc. This part shows the body structure of the core of the research. The third chapter is the conclusion of the entire thesis. On the basis of analysis of the text done in chapter two, it concludes the explanation and arguments put in the thesis.

II. Race and Gender in *Waiting to Exhale*

Waiting to Exhale is a novel by Terry McMillan. We can find the issue of race throughout the book. Race refers to one of the groups of populations constituting humanity. It is a socially constructed concept that divides human kind in major division in terms of distinctive characters. Gerzina defines race as follows:

“In its origin use, race itself referred to origins in common stock. This could be family, religion, on nation, but it applied equally to plant and animal life”
. (125)

She means to say categorization of a group of race resulted from biological basis. Race has its origin and it is applied equally to plant and animal life. In this sense hereditary transmission of physical characteristics becomes authentic base for the definition of race. In short, racism is the belief and discrimination in practice.

McMillan, in the novel *Waiting to Exhale*, as a literary text, brings out the effects of race and gender in the lives of African American women. She shows how females make conflict and resistant with the then society. She also depicts gender relationship creating a huge discrimination between male and female. The male female relation here is an unequal one. When males speak their voices are perhaps louder and clear for being less present to female voices. Patricia Hill in *Women and Language* defines gender as follows:

Throughout the course of life, males and females are socialized to accept and ascribe to certain gender roles. Gender role expectations create multiple identities deemed “appropriate” when both sexes adhere to these traditional norms and behaviors that oppress self-definition. In turn, females across all racial and cultural boundaries who break traditional gender role expectations struggle between self-

definition and” norm deviation. Whiles these role may hinder the quest for empowerment in the 1990s. Gender role are inherent part of western culture that consequently creates a dialectical tension that consequently complicates this self-definition process. (9)

She means to say, gender is a cultural construct. In every society there are certain norms and roles for male and females. These constructed rules and norms are no more existence in the women of 1990’s. In turn, females across all racial and cultural boundaries who break traditional gender norms, and struggle between self-definition and norm deviation. In the same vein in Hill’s work Hunt defines gender roles are cultural construct and that are rooted in historical matter in order to organized human. “Gender roles are described as cultural constructs that emerge in particular social and historical context to organize human life. These construct impose psychological sex artificial dichotomies in personality and activity that deny both males and females opportunity to fully develop their human potential” (qtd. in Hill9).

The novel’s story centers on the sisterhood of four young, professional African American women and how they support one another in their search for love, career, and happiness. Although there are distinct differences in the characters, each is faced with the reality of wrong choices they have made in their romantic relationship. Savannah is a professional woman, who was involved in an adulterous affair with married boyfriend. She has everything except a true life partner. For example, “I’ve got everything except I need a man. And I am not one of these women who think that a man is answer to everything, but I’m tired of being myself. Being single isn’t half as much fun as it used to be. Ever since I broke up with Kenneth, I haven’t even come close to being in love. I miss that feeling, and I want it back. ” (2) She has everything but she’s nothing until she has a man. She is very articulate, gorgeous

black woman. Robin Stroke is looking for love in all places. “She is bold and Zany, optimistic about everything, and she talked a mile a minute. She didn’t have a drop of no sense of style, but it was clear that she tried hard. She was a little on the fickle side when it come to man” (19). Bernadine is the self-denying mother, caregiver and superwoman. Bernadine fulfilled was true to life. She tries to balance career, family, and pursuit of self-identity. She is divorced mother of two children. Gloria Matthew is aged and matured than these three ladies; she is divorced mother raise her teenage son and operates a successful beauty salon.

They are seeking for true and stable love in their life. These ladies are in their mid-thirties and they all are independent. They did not need any material property from their love partners but they are seeking for true love and companionship. Among them two (Savannah and Robin) are still unmarried and have taken relationship with different males but could not find perfect one. Bernadine and Gloria were married but could not get happiness and satisfaction from their life partner. Bernadine’s husband divorced her. The narrator explains her situation in this way:

Right after Bernadine’s husband told her he was leaving her for a white girl, she stood in the kitchen doorway, snatched eighteen hot rollers out of her hair, and threw every last of them at him. A few loose curls fell over her eyes and into her mouth, so she pulled them behind her ears. “I am sorry,” John said, and finished the last of his coffee. “You can have the house, but I want the condo. (26)

Bernadine’s husband, John being black leaves his wife for white girls. This shows John imbibes to become whitens. He wants to neglect his black race in order to prove as whitens. By reading this novel we can say that Terry McMillan shows a kind of social criticism on African American life style.

Furthermore, Paul S. Reinsch defines race as continuing process; it is based on the belief and attitude of the people. He claims that especially in European society black became victim of white race. White proves themselves, superior at any cost showing incompleteness to the blacks:

Racism is based on the tendency towards adhering and preferring the values and personal beliefs of one's own group. It is also based on tendency toward categorizing information and using generalized assumptions which often lead to stereotypes and negative biases, and judging the values and standards of minority group cultures by the values and standards of the majority group culture and labeling the former inferior, the concept of Negro race as inferior and European civilization as superior is based on the belief that negroes lack certain qualities, such as lack of good social organization and social actions, lack of fellow-feeling, lack of originality of thought and lack of artistic qualities especially" deficient on the side of mechanical arts and in general showing no tendency toward higher development. These characteristics are made on the basis for justifying slavery and slave trade. (3)

Paul S. Reich in his "*The Negro Race and European Civilization*" justifies for blacks' low social organization and consequent lack of efficient social action, from the most striking characteristic of the Negroes race. Reinch believes that the extent of black race is the result of the race mixing i. e. black race coming into contact with white race. "The mixed races produced by Europeans and negroes exhibit some very fine qualities. He believes that the twentieth century world will witness the formation of

new mixed races and the attempt to adjust the mutual relation of all various people that inhabit the globe". (2)

In the above lines the racial inferiority complex is the result of black race, measured from perspectives of whites. A Negro who is driven to discover the meaning of black identity; white civilization have forced on existential deviation on the Negro. That is to say black soul is white man's artifact.

In the novel too we can find such problem, Savannah belongs to black race in her office, while other members were white. She had a lot loads in the office while other white members hadn't:

"These white folks are trying to drive me crazy, you know that?"

"Why? What's going on?"

"First of all, there are four other underwriters in my office besides me, okay?" I mean, why couldn't they ask Molly or Norman to do it? They didn't have anything pressing. Although it does take Norman all day to do nothing and I guess I am supposed to be flattered? Well, I am not.

Want to know when they're gonna stop testing me. I have proven myself million times over. (210)

In addition to this Dubois claims that racial domination has permitted the society with the position of superiority and inferiority complex. The domination has created double consciousness. Dubois even questions the fatalistic mind set by Negroes; the racial injustice come to black by whites. Black is black, not because of themselves but because of whites. That is to say black soul is white man's artifact.

Racial domination has permitted the society with the position of superiority and inferiority. The domination has created a state of double consciousness in the mind of Negroes . W. E. B. Dubois writes

the resulting sense of duality for black people; why did god made me and outcaste and stranger in my own house. . . ? The Negro of a sort of seventh son; born with a veil, gifted with second – site in the American world- a world which helps him no true self consciousness, but only lets himself through revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking measuring ones soul, by the tape of world that looks on an amused content pity. One ever feels his two ness- an American a Negro, two souls , two thoughts to reconcile strivings to warnings ideals in own dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (5)

In the novel *Waiting to Exhale* John (Bernadine husband) follows white folks although he belongs to black race. He has his own view point “One day I am going to exactly what they have”. He would say. “They” being rich white folks” (34). John totally follows the customs and cultures of white people because he knows that whites are superior than black. He did not want any child to have an African name. “He wanted to name her Jennifer or Kristen or Ashley or Lauren, you had made a deal, and you kept it.” John didn’t put anything that symbolizes black race in his house. He did not allow his children to read in black’s school so he ordered his wife to admit in white’s school where there only two other black children read. He did it all because he finds white people are superior than black. White people symbolize white power authority and control. He believes that by adopting the white culture he too become the superior so race has made him proud too. Throughout the novel, he follows the white customs wants to be master, he is egoistical and racist but also vulnerable at the times easily overcome.

It is really difficult for African American women to select to good life partner because of race and gender, even they are educated. These all four characters suffered from this problem. Savannah is thirty six, attractive, successful professional women experiencing relational dissatisfaction with the men she have chosen to become romantically sexually involved with. She is still single, educated and searching for “right man” but could not get. For example, “I know what I like and don’t like, and it does not take long for me to tell if there’s any chemistry at work or not. I’ve met a whole a lot of educated, successful, handsome black man who does not turn me on. Riff raff comes in all kinds of packages. “So”, I said, and took a long drag from my cigarette”. (5)

From the outside, everything looks good. I have got a decent job, money in the bank live in a nice condo, and drive a respectable car. I have got everything except a man. And I’m not one of these women who think that man is the answer to everything but I am tired of being by myself. Being single is not half as much fun as it used to be, Ever since, I broke up with Kenneth, I haven’t even come close to be in love and that was almost four year ago, when I lived in Boston. If I want something to happen, I know I have to make it to happen. And as hard as I have tired, nothing unforgettable has happened to me since I have been in Denver, which is why I am getting the hell out of the year. (2)

We can see she is suffering from dialectical problem of personal and professional life. Savannah is in need of love. She is not in favor of spiritual love; she is thirst of physical love because she wants to be safe in her life getting a good life partner. She is in search of perfect life partner; she wants to share her feeling and emotion with her life partner but could not achieve it.

Another character Robin is successful business woman, educated African American lady. She too in search of true and decent life partner but at the end of this novel she could not achieve it. She becomes mistress of Russell but he deserted her. For example:

So, like a fool I kept my fingers crossed and hung in their six month. I did not wanna lose Russell. I'd have five serious relationships over last seven years, and two of them ended because they met somebody else. I was determined not to let that happen again. I did everything in my power to make sure Russell would love me. I kept myself up". He is in debt but she paid all his debt because she used to love a lot. "Russell was in so much debt I borrowed three thousands dollar from my parents and lent it to him so he wouldn't have to file chapter 11. He got in a minor car accident, and as it turned out, his insurance has been cancelled. But since I work for one of the biggest insurance companies in phoenix, I made few phone calls able to get him a back dated policy, and at a cheaper rate then he was paying before. He was having a string of bad luck, because then somebody stole his car, so I cosigned for him to get another one, because he could not go to work in his motorcycle. (45)

These lines indicate that Robin loves Russell too much and want to spend her whole life being his wife. At the beginning she totally trusts him and has believed that he too loves her. Later she realizes that he was fool. Russell betrays Robin. He regularly says her I love you he kissed her. He said "I do wanna marry you, Robin, but it's a big commitment, and I am just trying to get used to the whole idea. As soon as I am, believe me, baby you will be the first to know". (42) He always shows the words of

promise to Robin that he will marry to her but his promise become worthless. Robin's desire of finding "Mr. right" becomes worthless. She does have everything except the true love of Mr. Right man. So, it is about rejection, and feeling inadequacy felt by African American women regarding their body is compared to the white women.

The third character, Bernadine Harris is a homemaker who is committed to her husband and children, until her husband divorces her, leaving her with their two children and few financial resources. She faced the racial problem because her husband leaves her for white young woman, I think McMillan used this character to voice something that is not talked about but felt. Bernadine's husband John unhesitatingly says to Bernadine, "I have filed for divorce because I want to marry Kathleen. I will be back next Sunday to get my stuff". It was entirely too easy for John to tell it to her because he filed with racist mentality. Bernadine asked her husband about their kids:

"What about Onika and John junior"?

I love my kids he said. And "I will make arrangement."

"Arrangements?"

"You will get some money don't worry."

Money?"

"That's what this was really all about."(38)

These lines indicate that John is going to divorce to Bernadine for white woman Kathleen. He gets younger and white girls so he divorced Bernadine, he did it because whites are superior to blacks. They have two children John tells that he will make arrangement and settlement to their kids despite giving divorce to her. He entirely decides to divorce to her by listening these words. Bernadine felt as if she had been plugged back in. Her finger twists and her feet tingled.

It's easy for man to give divorce but this same thing becomes hard for woman. She feels that she was going to be thirty six years old divorce mother of two (children), which means she is going to be a single. She is in her middle age to start new life. Bernadine had not remembered the house, or driving, or the fact that John had left before her. She trusted him blindly. Bernadine had not expected this kind of betrayal and insult to her. John knew this would hurt her, she thought, as she tried to will the tears rolling down her cheeks to evaporate. As a matter of fact, she could not understand John because John imbibes white values and their main ideas. To demonstrate this complex appropriation of whiteness in John, I quote at length:

It had taken years for her to see that he was nothing but an event junkie: married had been an event; the business had been an event; and the kids had been event too. And just as he'd promised, he had conquered dream, but a dream house in a picture-perfect neighborhood and filled it with picture-perfect furnishings. Since they lived in a desert John wanted the yard to like one, so he spent a fortune on mature palm trees, ten-foot saguaro and ocotillo and mesquite trees and almost every other form of desert vegetation the landscaper had shown him. Neither of them played tennis, but there was room for a court, so he put one in. And a lap pool, which he'd been in may be there or four times. Since the time she had almost drowned, Bernadine was scared of water and had never done more than put her feet on the steps in the shallow end. And John just had to have what Bernadine thought of as Hollywood cars: he had bought her BMW, a Porsche for himself, and the Cherokee for hauling the kids around. (29)

These lines indicate that John was doing nothing but imitating the white folks he had seen on a read in magazine. He loved to entertain; he wants to make his family endorsement like that of white people. He reveals to entertain. He wants to make his family environment like that of white people. John was a shrewd businessman, he believed that money should make money for that reason; he always handled their financial affairs. He does everything at his will. He does not give importance to family members.

If Bernadine hadn't trusted him all these years, she'd have known that all of this had been carefully planned and calculated. Now- on paper- John's income would drop from four hundred thousand dollars a year to eighty. But Bernadine had trusted him all these years, and she had no idea how much it was going to cost her. (30)

These lines describe that John has put his whole authority upon her, Bernadine become puppet of John. He became male chauvinist, he dominates her vigorously. Her wills and desires have no importance at this home, he becomes resist. John wanted to adopt white culture believing that whites are superior to black. So he disguises own life partner. He does not give value to her; he does not share his property and income to her. Bernadine become so innocent and believes him each and every matter. She even not allowed checking his mail. She becomes victim of male domination but could not able to raise her voice upon her husband. At first she thinks that whatever her husband does is good, but at last she realizes that his corrupted and dominated nature upon her.

Gloria Matthew is a beauty salon owner and single mother of Tarik. David, her husband go far away from them for field scholarship, it becomes hard for Gloria to grow her child without father. She was three month pregnant before they got married

but she had no courage to tell him, and when he knew that he was in great shock. For example:

David, who was a track and field scholarship, had been selected to participate in the: 72 Olympics. Gloria didn't want to spoil his life and ruin his future because of her own mistake. After the baby was born, would he just acknowledge that he was the father? She told him she would never ask for anything except his whereabouts over the years, so that whenever the child grown enough or curious enough it would know how to fine him. At first, David was reluctant but his parents had laid such a heavy guilt trip on for being so irresponsible, he agreed to it. (73)

Gloria becomes worried listening the doubtful words from her husband. She is pregnant but David instead of giving sympathy and care to her becomes rude and manner less. So she started strong by heart to give birth the child without father. David becomes irresponsible to his wife and son. He listens the words of his parents instead of fulfilling responsibilities to his wife and son. He becomes male chauvinist. It becomes hard for Gloria to grow child (Tarik) without his father name. At six, Tarik started asking for his daddy. He had memorized how to say his prayers, and Gloria had always told him that if he wanted something special but reasonable, he should ask god for it; if god felt deserved it- or he had earned it- he would answer to the boy prayer. So Tarik started praying daddy – every single night. It broke Gloria's heart just to listen to him. By the time Tarik was seven he had already lost some of his faith in god, since god hadn't delivered. Gloria had no idea how much her life revolved around her son, until he reached that age where he preferred playing with his friends instead of spending his free time with her.

Meaning of Gender and Gender in the novel:

“A gender role is a set of perceived behavioral norms associated particularly with males and females in given social group or system. It can be form of labor by gender. Gender is component of the gender/sex system, which refers to “the set of arrangement, by which a society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity, and in which these transformed needs are satisfied” (Reiter 1975:159).

All society, to a certain effect, has gender/sex system, although the components a working of this system varies markedly form society to society. People’s gender role may be defined as the kind of activities that society determines to be appropriate for individual possessing their kind of external genitalia.

Gender roles have long been a predominant of the “nature versus nurture” debate. Traditional theories of gender usually assume that one’s gender identity, and also one’s gender role, is a natural given. For example, it is often claimed that women are naturally fit to look after children. The idea that differences in gender role originate in differences in biology has found support in parts of the specific community. Nineteenth century anthropology sometimes used descriptions of the imagined life of Paleolithic hunting and gathering societies for evolutionary explanation of gender differences. For example, those accounts maintain that the need to take care offspring may have limited the female freedom to hunt and assume positions of power. More recently, sociology and evolutionary psychology have explained those differences in social roles by treating them as adaptation. Supporting the view that gender role as adaptation, Alex comfort in *Sex in Society* (1963).

Explains:

The 'gender role' which an individual adopts 'manly' or 'womanly' according to the standards of his culture, is oddly enough almost wholly learned and little if at all built in, in fact, the age of two years is for gender role learned by the age of two years is for most individuals almost irreversible, even if it runs counter to the physical sex of the subject. (42)

Here Comfort uses gender roles to index the wide variation in styles of behavior between societies, but it also suggests that within them the degree of choice is fairly limited. At the same time, his more guarded emphasis in gender roles seems to tell against the promise of any easily accessible path to sexual liberation.

Rodney Stark talking about modern gender roles in his book *Sociology Tenth Edition*, says that gender is obvious in society. The gender role occurs with children playing materials and their nicknames. "Every society has a number of gender roles and takes measures to enforce them. Little boys, for example, are seen with blue blankets and are given toy guns and trucks to play with. Girls, on the other hand, have pink blankets and their toys usually consist of dolls and plastic cooking items". (112)

Even with the nicknames, gender is obvious in the society. Boys tend to be called Butch or something similar girls have nicknames more along with the lines of sweetie, honey. This is one of the methods that parents use to insure that their children will be different. In some societies, men are supposed to be aggressive and dominant, while women are gentle and submissive. Men go out and earn a living, while women stay at home and take care of the children.

Black Feminist thought was constructed to provide consciousness for oppressed groups; especially African American women. It allows them to possess

a self-defined standpoint symbolizing their uniquely different lives realities resulting from existence in an oppressive patriarchy. Because dominant discourse is male centered and feminist research doesn't typically encompass race concerns, Deborah King (1988) notes that African American women are experiencing both/or orientation. This experience gives them the advantage of relating to both worlds because of their multiple consciousness, yet standing apart because of difference. (qtd. in Hill 13)

There are distinct qualities of Black feminist thought that distinguish it from feminist thought, which is essentially concerned with white middle-class women issues. "Within Black feminist thought, there is concern for gender equality with African American organizations as well as economic and political subordination, the welfare of all economic classes, equality between African American male females, and the wider struggle for human dignity and empowerment" (qtd. in Patricia Hill 9).

As a standpoint, Black feminist thought captures experiences and ideas shared by African American women that provide a unique angle of vision self, community, and society.

Waiting to Exhale highlights the experiences of African American while focusing on the social construction of gender role expectation across gender and racial lines. For the African American community, there are certain expectations that are ascribed to with little reservation or concern. McMillan used gender and socialization and racial stereotypes (i.e. with family, society, and friends).

Significance of gender role is seen in the novel, many examples relating to the dynamic of male and female relationship seen throughout the book. Some of the stories that McMillan relates in *Waiting to Exhale* shows the intense power

relationship between men and female as well.

Bernadine relationship with her husband John can be taken as an example of gender relationship. He is a male chauvinist; he puts his authority and shows male domination in each and every matter:

There was too much order in this damn house. Everything was in the right place. She opened John's closet. His shoes were group by color. The suits were in order by designer, starting with Adolfo; sports jackets, trousers, tie too. He had a fit once when he discovered one of Bernadine's blouses mixed in with his shirts. (96)

This shows that John suggest his wife to keep everything in order, if she couldn't do this then he beats her. He doesn't love her truly.

The tripartite racial, class and gender oppression faced by black women in America also frames an important aspect of the stories here, for examples, Bernadine husband john keeps extra relationship with his book keeper, who is white and his desire to give divorce to his wife. He even didn't allow opening mail for his wife. Bernadine has to postpone her dream of opening catering business because John insisted her:

When John had eventually refused to give you the money to start catering business, claiming it was too risky, you took boring job, as a controller for a real estate management firm, and lied to him about your salary. You began to put money aside so one day you could start your business anyway. He had series of fits after you went back to work, because now not only did you have your own money but for the first time in years you had interest outside of him and the kids and this stupid house. (37)

Like the way the relationship of Robin with her lover Russell seems discriminatory. Russell always told Robin that he loves her and will get marry with her. Later he deserted her and her become shocked:

The last one shocked me, because it was Russell. I'd called him a few times but hadn't heard back from him since that night. "Robin please does me and yourself a favor; would you please stop calling me at home. It's causing whole lot of problems, and my wife doesn't like the idea of my ex-calling the house. Sorry to have break it to you like this. Hope you're well. (283)

The above lines shows that, Russell loves Robin till the time he didn't get another women, when he get another one he left the company of Robin. He shows his cruel and discriminatory behavior.

McMillan characterizes the character the in such a way to challenge gender roles and stereotypes. All of these women have been hurt in the past and now are looking for self-dependent. We can see a kind of resistance in these characters, the suppress start to resist against suppression.

Bernadine refuses to forgive her husband, when she knew his extra relationship with white women and his idea of giving divorce to her. She had emerged great rage inside her; this is clearly illustrated when she got into husband's closet, put all his clothes in his car and sets them on fire.

III. Conclusion: Conflict and Resistance in the Life of Black People

In *Waiting to Exhale*, the novelist shows the racist mentality of endowing superiority to whites still persist in the society. The redness of lips, style, colors and length of hairs, bodily shapes and size, sexual desire are still the socially constructed standards of beauty. In fact, all these concepts are the products of social prejudices. The black male imbibes white values and their main ideas, believing that whites are more powerful than blacks. John being a black tends to become whitens by giving divorce to his black wife and get married with white girl.

After a close analysis of the text, the researcher has come to the conclusion that when one is suppressed in the name of race and gender etc, their arises conflict between suppressor and the suppressed. The suppressed starts to resist against suppressor. Here, in the novel mainly black African American women resist against black men's suppression and domination. And this suppression is due to black males' imitation of white's values. In the novel black male John adopts the culture and customs of whites believing whites are more powerful than black.

The research has also found the role of gender in black life in McMillan's *Waiting to Exhale*. Traditional gender roles cast men as rational, strong, protective, and decisive; whereas women as emotional weak nurturing and submissive. It means man and woman are categorized on the basis of their sex. Taking sex in consideration peoples is given certain roles. According to social convention, males are considered to be physically strong active and independent. They are supposed to perform outer activities, whereas females are considered weak passive and dependent, whose task is to follow their husband. Though black

women is treated as property of black males, in the novel too Black women's are taken as property of black men. At first Bernadine follows whatever her husband asks her to do, she is fragile and weak. She couldn't able to raise voice upon her husband, she is modest self-sacrificing and nurturing.

In many cases, these African American women proved themselves superior to males. For example, Russell, boyfriend of Robin always shows words of promises to her. He used to say, "Just be patient, baby. I do wanna marry you Robin". (43) Robin finds that these words of Russell is fake and meaningless, she finally gave up Russell- a sneaky, whorish, Pisces- after realizing he was never going to marry her. She has grown anger in her mind, she wish there was some way she could give him life imprisonment; because he needs to suffer from a while, long enough for him to realize that women love is a privilege and not his right. She means to say women also goes to grant more power than man. She becomes more powerful. As the same manner, at first Bernadine is fragile and weak, she follows whatever her husband asks to do; later she is able to oppose her husband's suppression, she becomes independent. It is clearly illustrated when she goes into her husband's closet, puts all his clothes in his car set them on fire.

So, by analyzing such changing attitude of black women, the research shows the conflict and resistance between male and female. Both of them try to keep them in higher position. So, the research has successfully found conflict and resistance in McMillan's *Waiting to Exhale* neglecting traditional gender roles.

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