

Tribhuvan University

The Gendered Body in Resistance in Popular Culture: A Critical Reading of Personal
Narratives and Blogs

A Thesis Submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University,
In Partial Fulfillment for the Requirements of the
Degree of Master of Arts in English

By

Sujata Basnet

Roll No.: 106

Regd. No. : 6-2-717-38-2011

Central Department of English

Kirtipur, Kathmandu

July, 2020

Central Department of English

Letter of Recommendation

Sujata Basnet has completed her thesis entitled “The Gendered Body in Resistance in Popular Culture: A Critical Reading of Personal Narratives and Blogs” under my supervision. She conducted her research from March 2018 to June 2020. I hereby recommend her thesis to be submitted for viva voce.



Prof. Dr. Dhruba Karki

Supervisor

Date: _____

Tribhuvan University
Central Department of English

Letter of Approval

This Thesis entitled “The Gendered Body in Resistance in Popular Culture: A Critical Reading of Personal Narratives and Blogs,” submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University by Sujata Basnet, has been approved by the undersigned member of the Research Committee:

Members of the Research Committee:

Internal Examiner

External Examiner

Head of the Department

Prof. Dr. Jiblal Sapkota

Date: _____

Acknowledgements

Many people have helped me as this thesis grew from an idea to its present form. This would not have been possible without the generosity of many people who immensely contributed to my research and writing this thesis. At the outset, I express my humble gratitude to my supervisor Prof. Dr. Dhruva Karki, whose scholarly guidance and instructions helped me give this work its present shape. I deeply appreciate him for his generously constant support to me to bring this work to the present shape. Indeed, he properly instructed me to the right path to take this research project to its destination.

Similarly, I express my appreciation to Prof. Dr. Jiblal Sapkota, Head of Central Department of English, for ensuring that we get the highest standard of education. My sincere indebtedness goes to all my teachers for their constant guidance and encouragement to continue my study and conduct research work. I would like to extend my gratitude to the staff and faculty of Central Department of English.

Most importantly, I am thankful to my parents and relatives for their supports and encouragement that always inspired me to accomplish this work. My friends and associates deserve special thanks for their cooperation with my study and research.

SB

July, 2020

The Gendered Body in Resistance in Popular Culture: A Critical Reading of Personal Narratives and Blogs

Abstract

This research paper examines popular culture as a site where notion of normative sexuality and beauty are constructed, modified, and accommodated that creates space for resistance against such practices. For this purpose, the paper studies two memoirs: Victorie Dauxerree's Size Zero: How I Survived My Life as a Model, Lindy West's Shri!l: Notes from a Loud Woman; and selections from two blog, Aviva Dove-Viebahn's Ms. Magazine and Caitlin Lansin's About Face. In a capitalist patriarchy, Zillah Eisenstein looks at women's position in contemporary culture from a dual stand point in that she locates the roots of existing notions of normative female sexuality in capitalism and patriarchy. Along Eisenstein's line, Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" examines the cinematic representation of the erotic female in the culture industry's commodification of the gendered body in the capitalist-patriarchy. Likewise, Storey proposes two divergent functions of popular culture: the product of commodified practices made available by the culture industry and the practice in resistance to the dominant world values. These distinct perspectives of looking at popular culture will help us unfold resistance voices engaged in production, distribution and consumption of popular texts. Such an in-depth examination of the gendered body in the marketplace in popular personal narratives unravels as well as challenges the deeply-ingrained gender stereotypes and suppression existing in the capitalist patriarchy.

Keywords: Popular Culture, Capitalism, Patriarchy, Representation, Resistance

Popular culture is often defined in contrast to high culture. Popular culture is usually considered mass-produced commercial culture, whereas high culture is the

result of an individual act of creation. Even though the distinction between popular and high culture is a highly debated one, there is wider consensus in inherent connection between popular culture and media and technology. In other words, media and technology bring the high culture to masses for wider consumption, thereby making it popular. By the very nature of it, popular culture is consumed by wider heterogeneous audiences.

Traditionally, the term "popular culture" refers to the culture of the lower class as opposed to the high culture that belongs to the elite. Matthew Arnold defined Culture as "best that has been said and thought in the world"(6). Arnold argued that culture was in danger of succumbing to the anarchy of working class people as working class people started getting political rights and opportunities. His definition of culture corresponds with the definition of "high culture" that consists of the texts and practices considered of the highest class that is in opposition of low culture. With the influence of mass media and technology, the meaning of popular culture now is overlapped with mass culture, media culture, consumer culture, and commodity culture that consists of the mass produced, mass-marketed products.

Popular culture, as it is based on the masses, is subject to rapid change, acceptance and commercialism that often appropriate some aspects of folk culture.

In *Profiles of Popular culture*, Ray Browne defines:

Popular culture is the system of attitudes, behavior patterns, beliefs, customs, and tastes that define the people of any society. It is the entertainment

diversions, icons, rituals, and actions that shape a society's everyday world. It is what we do while we are awake, what we think about and how we approach the thought, and what we dream about while we are asleep. It is the way of life we inherit, practice, change, and then pass on to our descendants. (3)

Browne definition implies that popular culture is the system of practice and thoughts that is transferred from one generation to another. It can be understood as an extension of folk culture which emanates from a local group of people and is consumed and distributed in a local level. Due to mass media technologies, the folk culture extends into the form of popular culture that defines the daily way of life.

Similarly, Dick Hebdige describes popular culture as "a set of generally available artifacts: films, records, clothes, TV programmers, modes of transport, etc. [emerging] in the post-war period when new consumer products were designed and manufactured for new consumer markets" (47). Items of popular culture appeal the mass in contrast to the cultural forms available before the advent of commercialism. The existence of two cultures--"common culture" and "elite culture"--was questioned in the post-war period due to the advent of industrialization and urbanization. People who live in rural areas find themselves in crowded cities marked by cultural diversity and a sense of collectivity. This resulted in the "production of a cultural space for the generation of a popular culture or less outside the controlling influence of the dominating class" (Storey 45). Eventually, urbanization, industrialization, mass media and technological revolution led to the emergence of popular culture. The new culture outside the mainstream common culture emerged and constantly changed with time and place. That is to say, popular culture has undergone a paradigm shift from its

early days to the present in the sense that its understanding among the people has changed.

Similarly, popular culture as an industrialized practice seems to serve the interest of the capitalist economy. In other words, popular cultural forms are designed to serve the function of social control and order. As John Fiske asserts:

The economic needs of the cultural industries are perfectly in line with the disciplinary and ideological requirements of the existing social order, and all cultural commodities must therefore, to a greater or lesser extent, bear the forces that we can call centralizing, disciplinary hegemonic, massifying, commodifying. (29)

Fiske's assessment highlights an inextricable connection between culture and economy where cultural economy is designed to meet the needs of financial economy. Such cultural forms can be taken as a site which "the powerful construct where they can exercise their power" (32). Power comes into play in the cultural forms that produces subjects suitable for their economic and cultural needs.

Raymond Williams describes culture in general as "works and practices of intellectual and artistic activity" emphasizing its role in the signifying practice or the production of meaning (qtd. in Storey 9). He holds that a sense of shared cultural identity is fostered among the members of a cultural community. Likewise, popular culture allows people to define themselves in relation to the mass even on the global level. Popular culture ties the heterogeneous masses under the ideals of shared and acceptable behaviors.

Kasper Maase argues that in the aftermath of WWII (1914-18), many Europeans considered popular culture of the Americas "non-art" ("Cultural Radicalism" 49). All opponents of pop music, jazz and Hollywood films united

which, Kasper calls, “racist and anti-American” (Maase 49). As a result, popular art which was produced by the masses, appealed to the masses and was consumed by the masses was termed as degenerate art. Any human activity, including art and cultural practice becomes popular when it reaches a large number of consumers. Public consume materials which are recycled through multiple media and technology.

Things began to change only after the publication of Walter Benjamin’s “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”. In this essay, Benjamin explores the effects of modern technologies, such as film and photography on the work of art. He argues that mass production of art through technology diminishes the aura of art. The aura, which encompasses the originality and authenticity of a work of art, is lost when it undergoes a process of reproduction. In the loss of aura, Benjamin sees the loss of singular authority which is liberating "from its parasitical dependence on ritual" while mass reproduction of it helps it reach the proletariat (252). It made way for popular art to function as a medium of resistance against the dominance of high culture. During the 1950s as popular culture was slowly making its way into European bourgeois families through school and university students, these students of literature and cultural studies began to critically engage with bourgeois understanding of culture. They began to explore issues of revolt, subversion and resistance in films, detective novels, rock music, TV soaps, and popular games. Such a mode of studies began to gain foothold in the 60s and gained a positive label “pop” culture from the derogatory “trivial culture” (50). Beside university students, popular culture began to draw attention from famed Marxist and cultural critics.

From the Marxist perspective, popular culture is considered an industrial product of the capitalist system. Hence, the mass distribution of popular culture was taken as a ploy of the political establishment as ideological weapon against the

development of proletarian class consciousness while others took it as an attempt to keep the mass away from true, greater culture. The Frankfurt School calls pop culture “total delusional” (Maase 55). Marxist critics, including Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer view popular culture as "cultural industry" mediated through technology that "confines itself to standardization and mass production and sacrifices what once distinguished the logic of the work from that of society" (95). This implies that cultural industries in the capitalist economy produce commodities that have the power to define us. Therefore, popular cultural forms, such as mass media have shaped the perception of our reality reflecting and reinforcing certain values and beliefs.

Unlike traditional Marxism that views culture as economically shaped superstructure, it is now taken as a political battlefield. So culture, just as power, is now understood more in the Foucauldian discursive and the Gramscian consensual sense. This gives popular culture a new dimension of studies—resistance—which is highly political in nature as it undermines the bourgeois claim of superiority of high culture. Relating to this view, Stuart Hall agrees popular not as un-biased and apolitical but as a "contested site for political construction of the people . . . [who] are distinguished from the economically, politically and culturally powerful groups within a society" (41). His definition also concurs on the fact that power relations come into play in the realm of popular culture though it has been distinguished from the high culture as the culture of the masses.

The implication behind popular culture as space for power struggles inevitably leads one to the areas of ideology and discourse. As Storey argues, "ideology is a crucial concept in the study of popular culture . . . [its] study amounts to something more than a simple discussion of entertainment and leisure" (22-25). Ideology, by the very nature of it, suggests a certain "masking, distortion or

concealment" that reflects the world in the favor of the dominant group (22). Such ideologies are produced in such a way that they appear to be natural, neutral, unchangeable and inherent concealing the existence of domination from those who are in power. Precisely, popular culture is often shaped by power and ideology of the dominant class in a society.

Obviously, the entry of women into such an important aspect of the public sphere has traditionally been viewed as a sign of emancipation and privilege. In the light of such evidence, it is highly likely to boast on the lessening of gender inequality. But it seems to be too early to be confident and to celebrate that freedom given the fact that the traditional lopsided notion of masculinity and femininity has been perpetuated, privileging the former. Capitalist industries continue to enforce the misogynist view in these very spaces. The commodified forms of femininity are sold as products in such a way that it meets both the cultural and economic needs of the capitalist society. Media and popular culture have presented new versions of female subjectivity which commonly emphasizes sexualization, individualization and preoccupation with the body and consumer culture.

With the widespread influence and access of media technology, women's identity with respect to body, beauty and hyper-sexuality is mediated and produced in the media discourse. In the domain of popular culture, "women have been trained more than men to invest their social identity, self-esteem and sexuality in the appearance of their bodies" (Mulvey 12). The practice of endorsement of ideal femininity based on sexuality underscores other personal attributes traditionally associated with masculinity.

Given such a situation, it is of little wonder that feminists as well as people of various walks have been questioning and resisting such problematic practices of

popular culture. Jayne Wark, in "Wendy Geller's 48-Hour Beauty Blitz: Gender, Class, and the Pleasures of Popular Culture" brings this to light: "although the study of mass culture gained validation during the 1960s and 1970s, . . . the forms of popular culture produced for, and consumed by, women remained the object of derisive scorn" (45). Geller adds:

[G]lamour, beauty, and the perfect body . . . are the values upheld within our culture as necessary to the fulfillment of desirable femininity. The prescriptive models and images of ideal femininity that surround us in both art and popular culture serve as compelling examples of sexism's "endless variety and monotonous similarity. (41)

Despite such objections by feminists, the monolithic and sexualized portrayal of women has pervaded the domain of popular culture. However, the ongoing unchecked sexism and objectifying tendency against the female bodies in popular culture indicate the inadequacy of the modes of resistance exercised by mainstream feminism. This, thus, invites a close and a deeper critical inquiry.

With the rise and currency of popular culture, women have crossed the comfort-zone of private sphere and have had considerable participation in this public sphere. However, the notion of agency and choice is still hotly debated amongst the critics and scholars of popular culture. Some argue that the notion of agency and choice is used as a cloak to obscure the many facets of socio-culture pressure behind such choices. Deborah Harris-Moore, in "Resistant Bodies and the Politics of Perfection" summarizes ideas of female freedom in popular culture:

[C]reativity with our appearance and bodies, which some may argue constitutes choice and power, is not agency in a society that influences the

scope and nature of that creativity. [. . .] those choices are part of a very complicated process shaped by many social and personal factors. (139)

Harris-Moore observation implies that freedom of choice and agency in popular culture are illusionary as they are dictated by many social as well as personal factors. Claims like Harris-Moore's acknowledge that social forces are more powerful in determining social structure than individual will which thwart any attempt for resistance and change. However, this line of thought is one that is highly contested in cultural theories.

Alternatively, some of the post-feminist cultural critics, including Keith Green and Jill LeBihan consider feminism a redundant critical approach to studying cultural practices because "equality has been achieved" by women (253). They often reiterate that women have the same access to public domain of popular culture as men. Amid all this, however, the important questions arise: If these claims are true, why are women still demanded to maintain and discipline their bodies? Why are they subjected to conform to the ideas of femininity as a worthwhile object in the post-feminist era? Why do they still suffer and feel vulnerable at the hands of men? Why do young women in the present day feel constant pressure to conform to the ideal feminine body and beauty standard? Unless we find answers to these questions, making a deep critical inquiry on these issues will not lose its significance. With the increasing influence of popular culture forms and mass media on our society, such studies in popular culture become even more inevitable.

While some of these debates might look misguided, one thing is for sure: popular culture does act as a space to create and perpetuate unrealistic female beauty standards while simultaneously creating space to resist those practices through the body and text. In this regard, this research paper critically examines the acts of

resistance enacted by individuals in the form of memoirs and blogs which has been ignored as minor and trivial indulgence. In other words, this paper sheds light on the other side of popular industry which has not been given proper and serious attention. By engaging in studying under/mis-represented experience, patterns and problems of women in popular culture, this paper aims at exploring the possibility to look beyond an understanding of the popular culture that not only produces gender standards and stereotypes but also provides a space to subvert and resist it.

In this research paper, theoretical tools for interpreting and analyzing the texts in question are based on the works, such as *Capitalist Patriarchy* by Zillah Eisenstein, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" by Laura Mulvey, *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture* by John Storey and *Feminist Approach to Popular Culture* by Lana F. Rakow. In *Capitalist Patriarchy*, Zillah Eisenstein looks at women's position in contemporary culture from a dual stand point in that she locates the roots of existing notions of normative female sexuality in capitalism and patriarchy. This socialist-feminist standpoint offers an understanding of the female body as a gendered body that is subjected to commoditization and sexualization under the dual systems of capitalism and patriarchy. This then opens avenues for women to resist, challenge and change such perceptions and practices by engaging in a new set of practices that are more open and liberating. A closer look at the text would suffice the point:

As the expectation that men singly support their families is dissolved, men may lose more of their social power in the family . . . Women's growing consciousness of themselves as workers is strengthening their sense of equality with men of their own class and stimulating resistance to their continued sexual exploitation by men. (129)

Capitalism's intricate nexus with culture in general and popular culture in particular prompts Eisenstein to see how such economic practice prompts resistance against itself as a system and against males as its proponents. In this sense, popular culture becomes a battle ground for various interest groups to exert their control over the others.

Along Eisenstein's line, Laura Mulvey, in her seminal essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", argues that the representation of female body in visual culture is intended to serve the capitalist male gaze. Mulvey's examination of the cinematic representation of the erotic female character unfolds the culture industry's commodification of the gendered body in the capitalist-patriarchal society. In this regard, popular cultural critic John Storey proposes two divergent functions of popular culture: one, that it is the product of commodities and commodified practices made available by the culture industries; the other, it is a practice which is empowering to subordinate and resistant to dominant understandings of the world. These distinct perspectives of looking at popular cultural texts will help us unearth oppressive as well as resisting voices engaged in production, distribution and consumption of popular cultural texts. Such examination challenges the deeply-ingrained gender stereotypes and suppression existing in the capitalist patriarchal system. These perspectives help us see how popular culture acts as a cultural space that produces, challenges, questions, and negotiates issues of gender, sexuality and body image.

The primary texts under scrutiny are four personal narratives in the form of memoirs and blogs: Victorie Dauxerree's *Size Zero: How I Survived My Life as a Model*, Lindy West's *Shrill: Notes from a Loud Woman*, Aviva Dove-Viebahn's *Ms. Magazine* and Caitlin Lansin's *About Face*. These narratives have been selected as

their problematic pivot on the issue of the body image and its impact in the context of popular culture. The secondary sources of information include critical reading and evaluation available online, in the library or elsewhere, which are supportive and related to the area of investigation. Guidance from the supervisor, other professors and lecturers is equally crucial in bringing this thesis to completion.

Popular cultural forms are the domain where cultural values are constructed, mediated, reflected and at the same time reinforced. It entails the contemporary aspects of our lives. In other words, culture is a breeding ground for social values like gender and caste. Unlike sex, which is a biological fact, gender is socially constructed and reinforced through normalized domestic and social practices. Hazel Reeves and Sally Baden describe "how a person's biology is culturally valued and interpreted into locally accepted ideas of what is to be a woman or man. Gender and the hierarchal power relations between women and men based on this are socially constructed and not derived directly from biology" (30). So, what is to be men and women are socially constructed rather than natural. In that sense, gender is a socio-cultural construct. Hence, the attributes related to gender are contextual and changeable. Also, gendering can be taken as a multidimensional process of biological, social and cultural constructs that play significant role on the formation of image, role, power and identity of men and women in society.

Furthermore, the male and the female are the dimension of sex, masculinity and femininity can be taken as the dimensions of gender. As T. Moi argues:

Among many feminists it has long been established usage to make feminine and masculine represent social constructs and to reserve female and male for the purely biological aspects of sexual difference. Thus 'feminine' represents nurture and 'female' nature in this usage. 'Femininity is a cultural construct:

one isn't born a woman; one becomes one as Simone De Beauvoir puts it. Seen from this perspective, patriarchal oppression consists of imposing certain social standards of femininity on all biological women in order precisely to make us believe that the chosen standards of femininity are natural. (209)

This observation is clear in its proposition that femininity and masculinity are the products of socio-cultural aspects that define the role and behavior of male and female. Male-oriented society puts women in the lower ladder while male on the superior position. This division has been legitimized by patriarchal belief system and tradition.

Gender roles are carefully and strategically imbedded into social fabric in such a way that they look natural and acceptable to many members of society. This general acceptance of gender roles results from the fact they are taught and practiced from an early age of an individual. As contemporary feminist critic Judith Butler states:

Sexuality is culturally constructed within existing power relations, then the postulation of a normative sexuality that is before," "outside," or "beyond" power is a cultural impossibility and a politically impracticable dream, one that postpones the concrete and contemporary task of rethinking subversive possibilities for sexuality and identity within the terms of power itself. (124)

Butler sees that sexual identity and gender relations are influenced by power. What is it to be ideal feminine and masculine is not natural concept but an outcome of our belief system. A person becomes virtually blind to the cultural politics of gender influenced by power. Patriarchal ideology tends to justify the rule and dominance of men as being natural and biological.

Sylvia Walby theorizes patriarchy as "a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress, and exploit women" (20). In Walby's

perception, the expression "a system of social structures" clearly refutes the concept of gender roles as biological determinism that views women as inferior and thereby limited to her body. In a similar line of argument, Bhasin sheds light on the gender binary that is falsely imposed and accepted across societies:

Women are labeled as body, nature, emotion, subject and private while men as mind, culture, reason, object and public. Not only have the two been ranged as polar opposite, a hierarchy has been created between [them] . . . Women are the bodies, almost like nature; men are the minds, thinking, rational, acting beings that work on nature and transform it into culture. Men are therefore superior, over and above nature; they can do with nature what they please.

(16)

Such a labeling of individuals results from our long-standing social structure that privileges men while relegating the female to a lower position in society. The traditional masculinity features male control, male dominance and power over women. Women are subjected to be subservient and docile at the hand of men. Men are viewed as the subject, whereas women as the object.

This socio-cultural construct of gender manifests itself on many of its facades including popular culture. Popular culture has been characterized by media and entertainment. Thus, there has been obsession of people with celebrity culture, a practice in popular culture of propelling personal lives of an individual actor, sportsperson, model or singer to a global scale of recognition.

The popular cultural invariably perpetuates our traditional dogmatic beliefs regarding gender. Ellis Cashmore, a pop culture critic, in *Celebrity Culture* exposes:

A peculiarity of celebrity culture is the shift of emphasis from achievement-based fame to media-driven renown. This is captured in the contrived verb *to*

celebrify, which, while never formally defined, might be interpreted to mean “to exalt; praise widely; make famous; invest common or inferior person or thing with great importance. (7)

Cashmore's argues that the celebrity culture surrounds us and even invades us with the proliferation of media. Through media technology, celebrity culture projects celebrity in an exalted manner to "celebrify" or popularize them. In regard to gender, women celebrity's identity with respect to body, beauty and hyper-sexuality is mediated and produced in the media discourse. The culture industry, through the projection of independent and assertive celebrity emphasizes the idea that female emancipation has been achieved. Problematically, female celebrities tend to adhere to the idea of femininity perpetuated by the media by presenting themselves as material stylish girls. The culture industry strategically sells and exploits femininity and domesticity through varied popular events, such as beauty pageants, fashion shows, advertisements, movies and songs. But as long as these celebrated personalities submit and conform themselves to the gendered expectations of the capitalist society, missions of women's liberation can never be accomplished. They do not become anything but a mere appendage to the vast popular culture industry.

To deepen our understanding of gendered bodies in popular cultural, we need to understand how gender comes into play in popular culture. In modern time popular functions, including beauty pageants and fashions shows, women are presented in glamorous attires like bikinis, high-heels and glittering ornaments with flawless skin. Further, young girls in movies and advertisements are presented in a skinny figure, a certain height and shiny long hair, all that is subject to the male gaze. The skinny models on such platforms are the main focus which implicitly sets standards for beauty and success. The bodies of such females are hyper-sexualized to please the

male audience. As Jessica Valenti expresses, "we see images of unattainable beauty norms everywhere --in magazines, television, advertisements, movies, you name it. All touting the same image of what's supposed to be an attractive woman: white, thin, blond (usually) . . . the whole package" (30). The bombardment of such images that insists on ideal femininity affects women's body image. The implication that female body is to be "celebrify", objectified and consumed by men serve as an diminishing force to young girls in our contemporary culture.

The emphasis on maintaining a youthful feminine appearance and unattainable standard of beauty marks the resurgence of traditional gender ideology based on patriarchy. Beauty expectations have ". . . become so normalized! Oh, don't like your tits? Shove some new ones in there! Hate your nose? Cut it off. Feeling chubby? Suck that fat out! You don't actually *want* that vagina, do you?" (Valenti211). In order to be a possible participant in popular culture industries, women have to meet culturally set beauty standards. Women's bodies are restricted by the measuring tape and judge's approval of their physicality. It shows how society continues to expose and objectify women's bodies.

The emphasis that such cultural forms put on the ideal female body, consequently, diverts the attention of women to appearance rather than their real abilities to make a difference in the lived world. Indicating towards a growing case of cosmetic surgery in reality TV Shows like *The Swan* and *I Want a Famous Face*, Leigh Turner argues that the people are "submitting themselves to popular understanding of what constitutes ideal bodies" (qtd. in Bordo 328). It demeans their intellectual capacity and growth turning the lives into a series of images that is unreal. Also, dissatisfaction with the one's body results in the lack of self-confidence and

inability to excel in public sphere. When women constantly strive to have a perfect body, it lessens their self-esteem and belief in their own abilities as an individual.

The popular cultural forms, such as fashion, film, magazine and TV attempt to equate women with the body. In the body/mind duality, body refers to nature and mind to culture or the rational and intellectual faculty. One of the dominant fields is advertisement which sells values, ideas, images, norms along with the products. For instance, in 2015, Protein World, a brand that sells protein supplements and boasts body positivity, launched an advertisement. It endorsed an ultra slim, tall, toned model in a bikini along with a text: "Are you beach body ready?" as if women that do not fit into the beauty standard are not capable to put their foot on the beach (Hackman 1). Advertisements like these convey young and adult women the message that a perfect body, as defined by the media, is essential to succeed as a woman. This brings in them a sense of incompleteness and guilt at their failure to live up to these standards of body.

Advertisement critic Jean Kilbourne, who collected the images in advertisements since 1979, noticed the pattern in all the advertisements that tells women that, "the most important is how we look" (1). In Kilbourne's perception, "women and girls compare themselves to these images every day. And failure to live up to them is inevitable because they are based on a flawlessness that doesn't exist" (1). As advertisements are everywhere from the building wall, billboards to the television, its influence is quick, cumulative and subconscious. It socializes women from an early age that woman should strive to achieve the perfect, innocent look spending enormous amount of our energy for that.

Unarguably, popular culture is not only flooded with the graphic images of women sexuality and objectification. In order to promote the products and the values,

mainstream media and the forms of popular culture also endorse men. Joseph Prud Homme complains that we have ignored to question "the commodification and sexualization of the male body. Mass-marketed movies by mainstream production companies as well as easily accessible print and internet media have conspired to establish the respectability of the consumption of the male form" (1). However, even when men are sexualized, their strength is given importance at the cost of misrepresentation of the female.

Alternatively, they are not ridiculed for gaining weight, for not being fit in the ideal beauty standard as women are. Kilbourne explains: "Men basically don't live in a world in which their bodies are routinely scrutinized, criticized and judged whereas women and girls do"(1). Such practices usually highlight men's positive attributes, such as physical strength and mental resilience and hyper-masculinity. They present eroticized images of muscular men be it in advertisements of other cultural forms.

In the arena of popular culture, gender is reflected and at the same time constructed. With the promotion of consumerism in the capitalistic society, women are commodified and their value is equated with sex appeal. The commodification of femininity clarifies how feminine gender identity is socially-constructed rather than an inherent quality women are born with. The "objectivity theory" that places female bodies in socio-cultural contexts with the aim of illuminating the effects of sexual-objectification on women shows the unrealistic depiction of the female attractiveness propagated by cultural industries and repeated exposure to this unattainable standard of beauty leads women to accept the notion of an ideal female beauty (Roberts 181). Consequently, the tyranny of ideal feminine beauty and objectification becomes normalcy and acceptable with the legitimization of cultural industrial forms.

Given such a situation, the ideological aspect of popular culture cannot be ignored. John Storey acknowledges the political dimension of popular culture turning to Gramsci's hegemony. In this light, Storey sees

[P]opular culture as a site of struggle between the 'resistance' of subordinate groups and the forces of 'incorporation' operating in the interests of dominant groups. Popular culture in this usage is not the imposed culture of the mass culture theorists, nor is it an emerging from below, spontaneously oppositional culture of 'the people' – it is a terrain of exchange and negotiation between the two: a terrain, as already stated, marked by resistance and incorporation. (38)

Interestingly enough, Antonio Gramsci's ideas of culture imply that popular culture is a "terrain" that encourages voice of dissent, challenges the dominant social relation and incorporates beliefs from the dominant class as well. This interplay of power and resistance is what characterizes popular culture of the twenty-first century. In addition to class, the ideas of hegemony can be applicable in other aspects of social relations in the domain of popular culture including race, gender, ethnicity and religion. Popular culture, in many ways, is the site of resistance against hegemonic power. And women have always remained at the forefront of resistance as subordinate members of society.

Traditionally, women have been limited to the private sphere of home and family whereas their mobility was restricted by these responsibilities. In *The Feminine Mystique*, Betty Friedan writes "women were not trained to understand and work in the world. Confined to the home, a child among her children, passive, no part of her existence under her own control, a woman could only exist by pleasing man" (138-139). Despite many political and social transformations, mankind has made till date,

this mentality still exists in our society and it raises its ugly head in many disguises in our social and cultural practices, popular culture being no exception.

However, women now have secured prominent positions in all the public domain of popular culture. They are proudly marking their presence from sports to magazines, from technology to art and literature and everything in between. This has given women a space to express their dissenting voices. They are asserting their identity, agency and freedom by actively participating in it while resisting gender stereotypes and social dogmas.

Media representation of women in popular cultures has been a contested issue in recent decades. There has been a consistent problem with the way women are portrayed in popular media. These representations eventually become the natural and expected image of the other by the consuming population.

With the widespread dominance of technology, multiple media, including films, music videos and advertisements, information reaches a large population at a greater speed. This results in the relentless and monolithic misrepresentation of the gender. Ultimately, it consolidates the popular representation as a realistic image to the mass audience. They are posed as reality and truth. Popular culture uses same strategies and techniques to represent the female body to the mass as long as they are commercially profitable. Popular representation has become a dominant site for the construction of the notion of ideal femininity. To reiterate Butler's remarks "[normative] sexuality is culturally constructed within existing power relations" (124). Butler is of the opinion that to name, to classify and to present someone in a certain way is to have power and domination on that subject (124). The right to represent refers to the "symbolic power which is not limited only in terms of economic exploitation and physical coercion, but also in broader cultural or symbolic terms,

including the power to represent someone" (Hall 259). To represent women in a rigid way as an object, highly sexualized and infantilized is to have domination over them. The images that pass through the filter of cultural industries are then considered as truth and inevitable.

The popular representation of women has continued to present the commodified forms of femininity. Women are limited to few essential characteristics and equated with the products in order to sell or promote an object. Such an act of "stereotyping reduces people to a few, simple, essential characteristics, which are represented as fixed by nature" (257). It implies that someone is represented as embodying few characteristics that are based on deeply engrained values, attitudes and beliefs. It has been the trend to grade women on a curve, on beauty and not on their worth as a person. Women are expected to dress up like sexy little girls even in fairy tales like Alice from *Alice in Wonderland*, the young girl in *Little Red Riding Hood*, Scout Girl in *Cookie Girl* and so on.

The cultural practice of turning living women into naked, silent object and to be gaze at is a commodifying practice. In this line of argument, Karl Marx defines commodity: an object qualifies as a commodity when it "satisfies particular needs [with] unlimited divisibility, homogeneity of its parts and uniform quality" (13). In other words, a commodity is an object that satisfies a need with both the use-value and exchange-value attached to it. It can be exchanged in a market or traded for monetary gain. Likewise, in a capitalist society, women are positioned as the object: the female body and her labor are commoditized to satisfy the needs of capitalist state. Female body is owned by the capitalist mechanism under the rug of patriarchy sometimes even in the guise of empowerment. A case in point, the reality star and celebrity, Kim Kardeashain posted her nude selfies on her social media account

stating "an act of empowerment" (*Irish Mirror* 1). However, the obligation and consequent internalization of looking perfect and sexually appealing for the male approval cannot be taken as an empowering act. The cultural forms have displaced the notion of self-loving and self-objectifying.

Under the illusion of empowerment, capitalism operates culture industries that use the female body for profit. At the same time, it sustains the patriarchal ideology demeaning the real attributes of women. Sexualization, men pleasure and male gaze are prevalent in these forms. "Women's oppression is not a theoretical prerequisite of capitalism but is historically embedded in its relations and thus material and that the role of ideology in this process should not be underestimated" (Barrett 11). It is obvious that patriarchy precedes capitalism and it is independent of the organization of capitalism. However, it is evident that the patriarchal relations still flourish in the capital mode of production. Oppression and exploitation of women are entrenched in capitalist mode of production which demands to be analyzed in this light.

In her memoir, *Size Zero: How I Survived My Life as a Model*, the once top model Victorie Dauxerree uncovers the ugly side of fashion industry that reduces young and ambitious girls like herself to the level of a commodity. Such telltale signs of mistreatment are hard to miss in her memoir. When she had just started off her career as a model, she was provided with a set of outfit that was "ultra-tight skinny black jeans to show off [her] legs to best effect; a black Petit Bateau tank top to flatter [her] top half, and then 'something vintage and something classy, that's what creates the magic balance'" (13). Apparently Dauxerree was expected to serve the hungry gaze of many male audiences that were expecting nothing more than a beautiful, erotic body of a female. In "The Veil, Desire, and the Gaze", Banu Gokariksel and Anna Secor argue that "fashion is constituted within the exchange of looking and

desiring that defines the field of the gaze" (181). Along these lines, Mulvey, in her essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," argues that cinema (and therefore any other visual media) offers "pleasures" to the audience relegating women to the status of object and "man as the bearer of look" due to the pervasive patriarchal consciousness in the society (19-21). An erotic representation of the female body persistently continues in such a way that objectifies women entertaining the wider public. The pleasure is depicted from a male point of view that places women in the position of *to-be-looked-at-ness*. She states that, "women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact" (19). And these impacts are created for specific purpose which is economic in nature. Therefore, the control exerted over a female body in order to please a male gaze has economic subtext.

Eisenstein illustrates what such practices mean at the deeper economic level: "the concern with profit and the concern with societal control are inextricably connected but cannot be reduced to each other, patriarchy and capitalism becomes an integral process; specific elements of each system are necessitated by the other" (28). In this sense, the forms of popular culture like fashion encourage women to have perfect femininity, a saleable object, which sustains the economy as well as the traditional gender definition. So, popular culture serves as the form of social control that produces subjects suitable for their economic and cultural needs. Systems like patriarchy and capitalism determine a female look by imposing their expectations and need on a female body. Their control over the body is hijacked by the patriarchal capitalist agent. In the fashion industry, the models are plainly ordered to "be natural, show willing, keep quiet and do what you're asked to do" (*Size Zero* 19). For the fashion industry, a model like Dauxerree becomes just an appendage to maximize

profit for businesspersons in the capitalist mode of production. In this sense, a female body is double-victimized in fashion at the hands of patriarchy and capitalism where these institutions serve each other's interests.

As these modern-day laborers bear the brunt of biased patriarchy and unjust capitalism, they are perpetually objectified frequently. Dauxerree recounts: "I felt like a cow at a cattle market. A piece of meat being scrutinized and weighed before being devoured" (22). One can clearly see a woman's body being treated like a mannequin placed before a clothing store in a metropolis and one does not fail to see the practice of dehumanizing a female body. On the one hand, women are often persuaded to maintain a slim body in the fashion industry's needs and expectations. On the other hand, they lack the courage and consciousness to break this vicious cycle. In "Flesh and Bones", Sascha Cohen argues that "the fashion industry knows that women can be counted on to loathe themselves, if adequately primed. Thus one could argue that high fashion incorporates aesthetics [which are set in such a way] that no living woman could ever achieve" (36). Cohen subscribes to the belief that women in the fashion industry are stereotyped to be dumb and naive where the only thing that matters most is how they look, a doctrine that is internalized by many models and would-be models. "Since I wasn't all that intelligent, the only option left to me was to be beautiful," writes Dauxerree (48). This statement echoes the culture of ignorance and submissiveness fostered and internalized by many in the fashion industry, one of the highest forms of capitalism. In the world of fashion, to be beautiful means to be beautiful for someone else. And that someone is a capitalist male gazer.

This patriarchal-capitalist mission is sustained by showing these women hopes of two impossible dreams: to be a "supermodel who everybody want[s] a piece of [and to] rise to the top, earn loads of money and kick off . . . life in an incredible

way" (26). In the early stage of her career, Dauxerree was fascinated by the prospects of materializing these dreams. She recounts what she called an "incredible, magical and unique" experience in the early days of her career as a model in a fashion show (112):

It felt great! I was filled with an amazing energy, which I could feel all around me and which was exploding in my legs, my stomach and my brain. . . .

Going forward into the middle of the flashbulbs, overcome with this phenomenal strength welling up inside me. I felt infinitely light, as if I were flying. When I got backstage, there was only one thing on my mind: to do it over and over again! I wanted to go back out and get that unbelievable, dazzling jolt of lightning again! . . . I loved fashion and I loved the whole planet. I loved my life full stop! I wanted it to be brimming over with moments like this one, which was like nothing else I'd ever experienced before. Wow! It was incredible, magical and unique! (111-112)

This moment of epiphany continues for a while for her. All the praise that was showered on her looks gave her a sense of achievement. It is this illusionary sense of success and fame that keeps young girls from realizing the toxic culture of fashion industry. Success is touted as the only thing that matters, be it at the cost of physical or psychological wellbeing. This rat race of becoming successful in the industry compels many girls like Dauxerree to overlook many forms of inhuman practices like food deprivation as if it were normal. And girls become overjoyed if they achieve any of these traits that are emphasized as stepping stone of success. In the world of fashion that values outer appearance, achieving a certain body standard is a telltale sign of imminent success. In fact, Dauxerree does not contend with her skinny body herself:

I scrutinized my 'unbelievable body' in the mirror. My legs and arms were very slim, there was the thigh gap that I liked, and my ultra-flat stomach and my ribs. Then the bones of my pelvis and sternum, and my breasts which were still too big for Lagerfeld. I had hollow cheeks, which gave me huge eyes. I was pleased that they liked all that. (157)

Dauxerree's account is characterized by many stereotypical images of a female body. But the fact that she is proud of having achieved these traits signals at very intricate workings of the capitalist-patriarchal ideology in the society she was born and raised in. She could not see at this stage that her body was used as a mere object to market a commodity that many companies would cash in on the resulting trends she would set. Caroline Evans and Minna Thornton, in "Fashion, Representation and Femininity" argue how women's representation in fashion is made along gender lines: "If we see women's fashion as a field of representations of the female body, it then becomes a significant text of how culture constructs femininity and how it addresses that representation to women" (49). Evans and Thornton's argument is clear: women's fashion has tended to reproduce gendered preconceptions about femininity that best serve social and economic expectations of males and of capitalism.

However, Dauxerree's revelation was not going to last long because she would soon be exposed to the evil side of glamour industry. Soon she uncovers the financial and sexual abuse prevalent in the industry. She critiques the false economic trap:

I can tell you that most of the girls are working really very hard for nothing much in return. You reckon that when you sign a handsome contract with a big agency, then you've hit the jackpot? That's not the case at all. Of course there's plenty of money involved, but most of it goes to the agency and to

reimbursing your expenses. In the end, you're left with barely 10 per cent of the amount stated on your contract. (*Size Zero* 104)

It is apparent here how the exploitative system traps young girls like her for economic gain and leaves little or nothing to them. Though excited initially at the prospect of good earning, she comes to the harsh realization that the agencies that endorse her take the benefits as well. Models like Dauxerre are exploited both economically and physically.

In capitalism, the profit is earned through the exploitation of labor. The models as laborer in the fashion industry do not have ownership right but only works on wage. In "The Empire of Fashion," William H. Sewell Jr. remarkably brings this modern capitalist working to the fore:

Under capitalism, the extraction of surplus value takes place through formally voluntary market transactions - the wage labor contract - to which the laborer submits only because he or she has been stripped of ownership of the means of production and is compelled to work for wages in order to survive. Labor is, as a consequence, subsumed under capital; in other words, it is harnessed by the capitalist to the production of surplus value. (85)

Sewell goes further on to see how fashion industry in the capitalist mode of production works to create more surplus value by "enhancing customer desire" through advertizing and fashion that "enable[s] a given quantity of labor to produce more value without increasing labor input" (87). David Tan brilliantly captures how capitalism works in popular culture by creating celebrities like Dauxerree and exploits their fame to its benefit. He views that "fame is in part defined and conferred upon a celebrity individual by the consuming public, and in part constructed and propagated by the cultural producers, . . . highlight[ing] the role of the audience in the creation of

stars, and their subsequent consumption as commodities" (169). Tan sees that "using a celebrity in advertising, product merchandising and other commercial contexts is likely to have a positive effect on consumers' brand perceptions and purchasing decisions" (170). But the tragedy is that these celebrities are used as means to an end. Tan sees that "exploitation of a celebrity's identity ought to take into account the effects of such a use on the audience-consumer" (170). Tan holds that consumers create a boomerang effect whenever they create celebrity in a capitalistic system: the masses produce celebrities and the celebrities are used by capitalists to market their products where both the celebrities and the masses are at a disadvantage.

The middle class women consume the beauty industry's products in the marketplace without any reservation. However, these female consumers and customers Eisenstein posits how exploitation and oppression of women in systems like capitalism and patriarchy is achieved:

Woman's oppression is rooted in more than her class position [so] one must address her position within patriarchy--structurally and ideologically--as well. It is the particular relation and operation of the hierarchical sexual ordering of society within the class structure or the understanding of the class structure within the sexual ordering of society which focuses upon human activity in capitalist patriarchy ...one must break down the division between material sexist ideology, because the sexual division of labour and society, which lays the basis for patriarchy as we know it, has both material form (sex roles themselves) and ideological reality (the stereotypes, myths, and ideas which define these roles). (23-24)

The economic system of capitalism and long-standing patriarchal beliefs has continued to oppress women in the modern day as well. Hers is a call for a total

revision in the way we look at the position of women because viewing women's disadvantaged position either only through the economic lens of Marxism or only through the perspective of radical feminists' biological determinism is insubstantial. It is because radical feminists blame on patriarchy alone for gender inequality whereas Marxist feminists claim that women's exploitation is the byproduct of capitalism. These assessments do not give the fuller understanding of contemporary gender issues. Focusing on patriarchy alone and ignoring capitalism or vice-versa does not seem to bring the problem into light. Hence, there is the need for a dual system theory that contextualizes women's issues in the backdrop of capitalism and patriarchy. The long standing dichotomy between exploitation and oppression is synthesized in a dual system theory. As Eisenstein notes, "exploitation speaks to the economic reality of capitalist class relations for men and women, whereas oppression refers to women and minorities, defined within patriarchal, racist, and capitalist relations" (31). In this way, the dual system theory exposes an inextricable connection between economic exploitation and oppression existing in the contemporary, capitalist mass culture.

In *Size Zero*, Dauxerre becomes a subject to exploitation in the capitalist economic system and the patriarchal social system. It is these ruthless systems that commodify and sexualize these young girls to their benefit. The commoditization of femininity, as Samantha Sewell puts it, "strategically market[s] products toward women for the purpose of selling into, and exploiting, their femininity and domesticity. Commercialization conveys the message that the only way to live up to 'proper' standards of femininity is to own the product being advertised" (1). The commodification of femininity demonstrates how a feminine gender identity is not an inherent quality all women are simply born with, but rather a construction produced

through commercialization (1). Therefore, patriarchy is always in a position to gain advantage by maintaining this status quo.

Because women like Dauxerree are treated no more than an object, their worth in the glamour industry remains as long as they can maintain their physical looks. So these girls are under constant pressure to look beautiful which begins to take its toll on them gradually. Dauxerree describes her excruciating experience of refraining from eating in order to get into shape:

I had constant stomach ache. I didn't realize initially that eating nothing but raw fruit could cause these symptoms. I thought that it was the anxiety, because my fear had flooded into the vacuum and silence of the holidays, as if I'd opened the taps on a big pipe and a nasty, heavy anxiety was bubbling up inside me. (47-48)

There comes a time when model like Dauxerree would struggle to keep up with the demands of their body with their growing senescence. This would lead them to a life of mental and physical deterioration. An onslaught of suffering from absconding eating does not end at this point. The diet that she takes in order to be fit gradually ruins her physical, mental and emotional state. The physical fragility was making way for more complicated mental ordeal for Dauxerree:

I was having more and more trouble sleeping. I constantly had the very painful sensation that the skin on my back was going to crack up. When I went to bed, I could feel every one of my bones and just couldn't find a comfortable position. And then there was my stomach, which was a constant source of suffering. High doses of laxatives were no longer enough to set my mind at ease. The moment I ate something, even if it was just a piece of steamed fish

or a quarter of a honeydew melon, I felt as if I were swelling up like a balloon.

(120)

Dauxerree's symptoms are manifestations of both physical and mental deterioration. The pains she underwent were not the result of her voluntary choices but of undue demands of the industry from her body that expected her to yield material benefits for it. Ensuring the system benefited most from her body, and it "scrutinized" her and verdicts were delivered (134). If her body did not meet the agent's expectations, they treated her like a non-leaving thing. Dauxerree recalls a situation where she did not look good enough for a show, so her agent "then jostled me violently back into my chair and all four of them pounced on me, tearing at the skin on my face and pulling my hair out with brushes until I had tears in my eyes" (134). To many, what seems like a nightmare was Dauxerree's daily life. She was making her body do more than it was capable of. As a result, it started giving in to the extreme demands and pressures. She came to a point where she "didn't want to be touched by anyone, not even by her [mum]. I didn't want to be touched by anyone any more; I didn't have a body any more. I wasn't real any more. I just wanted to vanish so that it would all be over" (217). She eventually realized that she had come to a point where she couldn't take it anymore. Eight months after first being spotted, she was one of the most in-demand models in the world. But instead of being happy, she says, "I was devoid of feelings and thoughts. It was as if I were dead" (210). However, trapped in the system's manacles, it wasn't easy for her to call it quits. It would be the decision of a lifetime which would mean that she had to bid goodbye to her hard-earned career and start over again. Amid confusion, anxiety and physical deterioration, she continued working. She was frequently mistreated and threatened by her agents while being under constant pressure to stay in size.

Despite all this, she mustered courage and decided to quit it altogether. She made up her mind. One day when one of her agents called up to announce that she had been chosen to appear on the cover of *Vogue Italia*, a fashion magazine, she said: 'Flo, it's no. I've told you, it's finished. I'm quitting' (221). This was a turning point in her life even though much damage to her physical and mental state was already caused. Avoiding body's natural need for food, rest and exercise had started to take its toll on her long ago. She had started showing telltale symptoms of life-threatening conditions like anorexia and bulimia. These diseases are classic examples of excessive emotional trauma, depression, or anxiety. Dauxerree reveals her diagnosis: "The medical examination revealed the sheer extent of the damage: amenorrhoea, hypotension, a good deal of hair loss and the skeleton of a 70-year-old woman" (240). This required her three months of stay at a doctor's clinic that involved "some acting, some yoga, some sport and some art therapy" to heal her physical and mental trauma" (238). When she came out ok, she came out with renewed dreams: to continue her study and to tell her life's story as cautionary tale so that she could reveal the ugly side of fashion and glamour in the capitalized world.



Fig. 1: Dauxerree during her early days in modeling. (*Size Zero* 118, i)

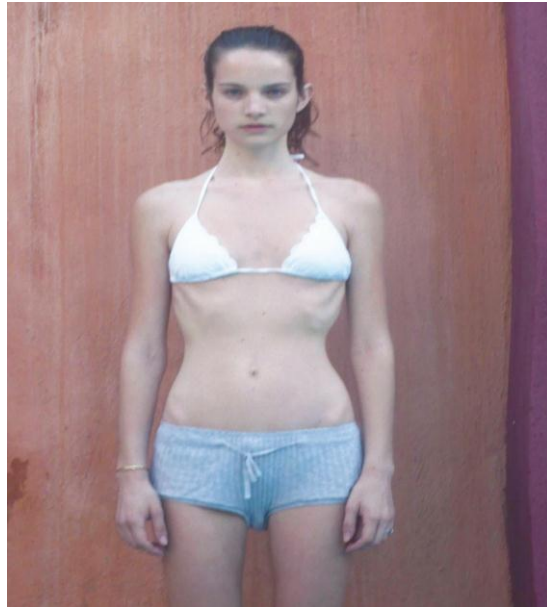


Fig. 2. Dauxerree during her heydays in modeling. She just ate three apples a day to fit "size zero". (118, ii)



Fig. 3. Dauxerree after quitting her modeling career and "studying, smiling, following [her] dreams" (118, viii).

The adjoining photos recapitulate Dauxerree's journey from an aspiring and optimistic young girl to an adult woman who suffered physical and mental abuse at the hands of

an exploitative system. This is also an inner journey for her as she moves from false hopes through disillusionment and finally arrives at the reality of life. She learns to accept herself for who she is and pursues her passion that will bring a sense of meaning and purpose to her life. In all this, what stands out is her courage to resist others' judgment and speak out the truth so that another girl doesn't have to go through what she has been through. In this sense, Dauxerree's courage to quit her career as a model, embrace her body as it is and start a new chapter of her life was a strong act of resistance. Her life "is the story of a survivor whose fight against poisonous illness and body image shows us how to take courage and embrace life" (Peronnet 1).

Denying staying in size to look beautiful was a resistance against patriarchy and capitalism because that would be undermining the stereotypical expectations of such unjust and unequal custom/system. This simple act of saying "no" is a strong act of resistance. When Dauxerree denied the offer to appear in a famous magazine's cover, it was saying no to a career that gave her all these years of pain, suffering and humiliation. It was saying not to the endless waiting around, to the rude dismissive casting agents, to the cruel designers, and to the endless pressure to get thinner and thinner. It is also saying no to a world where bodies "are ignored, mistreated and traded like livestock — and humiliated and discarded if they put on weight" (Anna van Praagh 1). Hers is lesson for many aspiring models about the "abuse in plain sight" (1).

Likewise, the courage to write a book of memoir is also an act of resistance where "what is unusual is how, bravely, Dauxerre names names – even the big ones" (Mills 1). Dauxerre does not fictionalize the names, nor does she use pseudonyms for the people and organizations. She puts it as it is for the world to know. Writing a book for public is to raise a voice. To raise a voice against an exploitative system is "to

blow the whistle" for others so it serves as a cautionary tale who would otherwise fall into this bottomless abyss of fashion and glamour (van Praagh 1). When one shows one's courage to resist and speak out against all the wrongs that have been meted out to them, there's a light at the end of the tunnel. Hence, by sharing her personal story, Dauxerre sheds light on the fashion industry abuses and encourages fighting back from the personal level. Dunn in *Mailonline* writes that the memoir "breaks code of silence" on the pressure exerted such form of popular culture that has negative consequences of the individual as well as society at large (1). As Dunn argues, Dauxerre exposes the constructiveness of the practice considered by society as natural.

Dauxerre, after quitting modeling, attempts suicide and then spends three months in a clinic, comes out of this trauma slowly but surely. Now 24, she presents a very optimistic picture of her life that she is living with dignity and renewed hopes:

In September, instead of going to New York fashion week where 'everyone was waiting for me', I went to the Sorbonne to start a degree in philosophy. The following year I began studying at the Cours Florent and the year after that I moved to London to complete my degree in drama studies at Roehampton University. I came to life again. (242)

Dauxerre's is a life that has been at the receiving end of all that is wrong and evil in patriarchal-capitalist society in general and glamour world in particular. Her suffering and humiliation is largely attributed to the patriarchal values that are constructed and promoted in our cultures. She suffered at the hands of men and a system that were built around the interests of male. However, she would not given in; she showed wisdom and courage to bring the evils of such system to the fore and denied to be a part of it, calling for meaningful rethinking against such unjust social and cultural

practices for equality and dignity. In an interview for *Broadly Magazine*, she proudly says "My goal today is to empower women and talk about body positivity" (1). She also confesses that had she read such book before, she would not have embarked on this industry. She is now devoted to raise awareness and change the culture of fashion industry redefining the notion of beauty and perfect femininity (1).

Similarly, Lindy West's memoir *Shrill: Notes from a Loud Woman* narrates the female body consciousness. In her personal account of fighting against internet trolls, accepting fat-body, overcoming body shaming, learning to find a voice as writer and most importantly contemplating oneself to find worth in herself as a woman, she unravels the prevailing mindset of our so-called politically and technologically-advanced society. The memoir is a testimony to the fact that mass and social media not only perpetuate the gender specific-attacks through Internet troll, body-shaming, harassment, disrespect and sexual objectification but also provide platforms for women to find their freedom. Interestingly enough, it too does act as a space to resist and subvert these belittling gestures and stereotypes.

In two key words in the title of the book, West highlights what a patriarchal society expects, or rather, does not expect of a woman. An outspoken woman is looked down in majority of societies. However, West signals her resilience towards such mentality by identifying herself with these very traits: shrill and loud. So a "shrill" from a woman is going against the grain. West does live in a technologically-advanced egalitarian society, but the irony it entails is evident. In *Constructing Virtue and Vice: Femininity and Laughter in Courtly Society*, Olga V. Trokhimenko remarks:

Our own emancipated postmodern culture may look infinitely unlike the one that requires women to be completely stiff, hide their hands under their cloak

and conceal their body at all times; yet under the surface the old stereotypes, clichés, and metaphors remain very much alive. Young women [are discouraged] from talking or laughing loud enough to attract attention. (194)

Trokhimenko's observation stems from that fact that contemporary society maintains double standard in its claim of gender equality and in its treatment of women.

Imposing its expectations on women and outlaw everything that does not fit into these narrow frameworks is very rampant. This is true to many aspects of women's behavior and body. West takes very careful note of this: "As a kid, I never saw anyone remotely like myself on TV. Or in the movies, or in video games, or at the children's theater, or in books, or anywhere at all in my field of vision. There simply were no young, funny, capable, strong, good fat girls" (*Shrill* 6). West's observation is quite on point. Popular media like TV and movies frequently promote the belief that a girl is supposed not to be "fat" in the first place. If she is, she will not be funny or capable or strong. What West observed around her when she was growing up had had a big impact on her that diminished her confidence and made her doubt her ability to achieve her ambition. She began identifying herself with the fat characters in the movies and TV shows such as Miss Piggy from *The Muppet Show* and Marla Hooch from *A League of Their Own*. These characters have been often made fun of for their body by other characters as well as audiences. West writes, "[h]er being a literal pig affords fat fans the opportunity to reclaim that barb with defiant irony" (11). A sense of self-hatred seems brewing in West from early on.

Unjust gendered ideology that was promoted and perpetuated by mass media had a lasting impact on her. West recalls that upon watching an episode of *The Adventures of Pete & Pete* where "Big Pete and Little Pete spent an entire episode fixated on the jiggling of an elderly neighbour's arm fat. Next, I didn't wear a tank top

for twenty years" (13). She had the impression that the fat in the body was something to be ashamed of and it was not okay to be obese. As a result, she "was too big . . . [but] my life [became] smaller and smaller" (21). The media that lived up to man's expectations and saw the world through a man's lenses, projected series of images of women with unattainable beauty standard insinuating that fitting inside those criteria is the parameter of success in the digital age.

Women like West are socialized to internalize such ideology as natural, universal and innocuous. As a teenager, West was made to believe that "chasing perfection was your duty... as a woman" (22). She was trapped in the double bind; while resented the mainstream cultural notion of seeking validation from others, she also attempted to fit into that definition. West believed that "America's monomaniacal fixation on female thinness" fueled the rage among young girls to be thinner and slimmer (22). As a result she saw her "friends starve and harm themselves, get lost and sink. They were picked by bad people, people who hurt them on purpose, eroded their confidence, and kept them trapped in an endless chase. The real scam is that being bones isn't enough either. The game is rigged. There is no perfection" (23). Majority of West's friends were manipulated into believing that being beautiful at the cost of personal dignity and comfort was okay. Heather Batson, in "Shaming Obesity", argues that "one who feels intense shame about a part of himself also internalizes related negative stereotypes. Obese people who feel bad about their body size also believe cultural stereotypes that associate fatness with gluttony, laziness, and lack of self-control. These ideas can affect their lives far beyond body size" (8). West, a "fat" female, had to bear the brunt two-fold: as an obese body and as a female. The stigma that was attached to a fat female body has always been very pervasive in societies across the world. Because this ideology has made its way deep into social

consciousness, breaking away from it would take a lot of efforts and a new level of understanding of the politics behind such practices. For an ordinary West it was no less harder.

However, sooner rather than later, West became aware of the inherent politics of male being at the helm of women's lives deciding their direction and destination "as [her] feminism solidified" (23). West recounts her transition from a reserved child, ashamed of her naturally fat-body to a successful woman who loves her body and is not afraid to be outspoken and loud. But coming out to public sphere was not easy in early days. She shares her experience of early days:

As a woman, my body is scrutinized, policed, and treated as a public commodity. As a fat woman, my body is also lampooned, openly reviled, and associated with moral and intellectual failure. My body limits my job prospects, access to medical care and fair trials, and—the one thing Hollywood movies and Internet trolls most agree on—my ability to be loved. (61)

West's experience is not unique as far as obese females are concerned. Even though the malpractice of fat shaming has proliferated in the age of Internet, it has been there in all phases of civilization. Alexandra A. Brewis and others posit that

In much of the industrialized west, where bodies are dominant and preferred symbols of self, slimness is associated with health, beauty, intelligence, youth, wealth, attractiveness, grace, self-discipline, and goodness. Fatness and obesity are by contrast associated with ugliness, sexlessness, and undesirability but also with specifically moral failings, such as a lack of self-control, social irresponsibility, ineptitude, and laziness. (269-270)

The blatant abuse and derogatory remarks that are hurled at a "fat" body do represent a mentality, a mentality that makes unjust moral judgments on people and demonstrates utter prejudice against the fatter members of society. The remarks have consequence for the offended that go beyond just the body: they impact one's personal, social and professional life to a great extent. West experienced these consequences first hand. "[M]y reaction to my own fatness manifested outwardly instead of inwardly —as resentment, anger, a feeling of deep injustice, of being cheated" writes West (62). The insulting remarks weaken her confidence and her ability to succeed. It hinders one's ability to see oneself worthy of fundamental human dignity and comfort.



Fig. 4: Lindy West, Chatelaine.com, May. 10, 2016

When West began her career as a columnist for the magazines like *Jezebel* and *Stranger*, she was ridden with anxiety about people's opinion about her body. She narrates some of the early days of her career: "It was early enough in my career (and before the Internet was just a 24/7 intrusion machine) that my readers hadn't yet

sniffed out what I looked like, and coming this close to self-identifying as fat left me chattering with anxiety all day" (63). Despite having proven her worth and ability, the prospects of her readers finding out her body size worried and preoccupied her. It was hard for her to accept her body for what it was. For considerably long period of time she was in a state of pendulum, oscillating between self-doubting and self-believing. This led her to ask a few fundamental questions about herself:

At the same time, I felt something start to unclench deep inside me. What if my body didn't have to be a secret? What if I was wrong all along [?] [What if] I could just decide I was valuable and it would be true? Why, instead, had I left that decision in hands of strangers who hated me? Denying people access to value is an incredibly insidious form of emotional violence, one that our culture wields aggressively and liberally to keep marginalized groups small and quiet. What if you could opt out of the game altogether? I paused and considered. When the nutrition teacher e-mailed, I didn't sign up for the next session of Almond Gulag. I couldn't stop looking. It was literally the first time in my life that I'd seen bodies like mine honored instead of lampooned, presented with dignity instead of scorn, displayed as objects of beauty instead of as punch lines. It was such a simple maneuver, but so profound (66).

As West rightly sees it, most of these questions were profoundly important and true. The moment of epiphany when she found right answers at this moment change her life forever. Now on, despite having to face humiliation and insult as a result of regressive male mentality, she would channelize her energy into changing minds and lives. At a time when Internet and social media has become a way of life, West's life in such a world is marked by both best and worst experiences. On one hand, she

started getting bombarded with insults of all shapes and forms on popular media platforms while and on the other, she started fighting and resisting them.

West faced a series of online attacks, abuse, rape threats as she started to speak against misogyny, diet culture and rape. One of her early confrontations was with Editorial Director at *Stranger* who would incessantly express fat-shaming views. Mr. Dan "got grumpy about women, 'particularly obese people,' wearing low-rise jeans, and dismissed the impact that stigmatizing language has on young women" (74). West concludes that Dan suffered from "fatphobia" (75). This is probably the tip of the fat-shaming iceberg. If a journalist at the helm of a magazine holds such derogatory views on fat people, one can imagine the extent of such mentality amongst general populace.

Later, West decided to go out to the public with a write-up "Hello, I Am Fat" with a full-body photo of hers attached alongside. She wrote clearly both of her struggle to get rid of her body as well as the pride she has now on accepting her body. She wrote: "I have never wanted anything as much as I have wanted a new body. I am aware every day that other people find my body disgusting ... This is my body. It is MINE. I am not ashamed of it in any way" (79). She starts to accept and own her body in the way it is rather than self-doubting and self-hatred.

Undoubtedly this prompted many responses--both negative and positive--on various platforms. Her boss Dan at *Stranger* was one of the first to post a comment that was fraught with disappointment at West's pointing a finger at him. He wrote: "you're projecting your anger and self-loathing onto me, and seeing malice and bigotry" (82). Despite his apparent dislike of fat people evident in many of his writings and correspondence, Dan shied away from admitting it publicly. This latent

mindset is very pervasive in people in all walks of life which manifests in many subtle as well as loud ways.

By now it has become clear that West started using popular cultural platforms such as the Internet to raise awareness about the impact of media culture for its insistence on the body image and sexuality which has given birth to practices such as filtered pictures on social media platforms, competitive weight loss groups, narcissism, before-and-after photos, and bikini selfies. She painfully recounts, "It [cultural platform] is gendered, though. . . . It's sexualizing me for the purpose of making me uncomfortable, of reminding my audience and colleagues and detractors that I'm a sex thing first and a human being second" (87). When she attempted to reclaim her power and become visible, she was faced with a barrage of hostile comments and abusive emails that directly attacked her activism. She believes such virtual practices do have physical impacts on a person:

Online harassment is not virtual—it is physical. Flooding in through every possible channel, it moves and changes my body . . . it alters my day-to-day behavior; it alienates my friends; it steals time from my family. The goal is to traumatize me, eroded my mental health, force me to quit my job. (85)

On the life threatening impacts of online harassment such as the one delineated by West, Tom Van Laer argues that "cyber harassment can have harmful effects on social media users, such as emotional distress and, consequently, withdrawal from social network sites or even life itself" (85). On the other hand, Anita Gurumurthy and Niveditha Menon see the ideological side of this online phenomenon in "Violence against Women via Cyberspace". They call for a

[R]igorous unraveling of the normative structures and processes through which paternalism and patriarchal discourses are reproduced, and also,

challenged in digital spaces - how, for instance, notions of womanhood, modesty, shame, honor are reconstructed in the relationship architectures of digital spaces and how these given categories may also be subverted. (20)

Along these lines, West reveals how women in popular cultural platforms are vulnerable and pressured to be confined within gender stereotypes. Despite her intellectual strength, she was vilified of her body that does not fall within the ideal femininity. In as late as 2016, she says, "there's no shortage of fat-haters roaming the Internet, the beach, and America's airports" (83). Her intellectual strength projected on her writing were undermined and criticized because of her physical appearance.

As a result, West faced more attacks for having an opinion and expressing it in the cultural forums. She was bombarded with insults and attacks on these platforms. One of the early insults came in the form of a troll on her blog page; it said, "I'm guessing Lindy's sexual fantasies involve aliens that love big girls and release a hallucinogenic gas while making sweet love to a fat girl that instantly causes her to imagine herself as height/weight proportionate. With long sexy legs" (87). This left her disturbed and "jarred" for a long time (87). The benefit that Internet gave West freedom of expression also gave someone an undue privilege to launch uncalled for attacks on her. In early days, she was not able to handle such personal attacks. She realized "the comment simultaneously sexualized me and reminded me that fat women's sexuality can only ever be a ghoulish parody. I cried. I went home early, feeling violated and climbed into bed" (87). This was only one representative troll West had to deal with. Another, for instance, was much uglier. She expresses great shock at receiving a disheartening comment, "embarrassed father of an idiot" from a person who named himself as her dead father (160). Gradually, came to the

realization that the comments were due to her being fat and "forthright in her writing" as a troll admitted in a conversation with her that "reading about fat people, particularly fat women, accepting and loving themselves as they were, infuriated him" (163-164). To a great disappointment, her genuine response against that relentless and abusive attack is considered "oversensitive" and "over-reactive" even by her own peers. The pain of stigmatization that she went through was merely understood by anyone.

As West's determination to resist patriarchal ideology by fighting misogynistic abuse online grew stronger, she started facing more and more abuse herself. Upon responding to a rape joke by a co-stand-up comedian, West came across this abusive comment: "I hope Lindy and all the people who commented on this article are raped" (121). Then she was called a "'fascist' who was trying to destroy his career and the career of any man who challenged the feminazi orthodoxy (121). In another instance, after debating Jim Norton on rape jokes for a TV show, she was mercilessly trolled in plain abusive language. One of the trolls read: "I love how the Bitch complaining about rape is the exact kind of Bitch that would never be raped. Bitch have you looked in the mirror?" (134). Another one went: "No one would want to rape that fat, disgusting mess" (134). There were a total of "6,745 comments" many identical in tone, language and content to the ones mentioned above (141). One can see how these comments were made not on the quality of debate but on West's body. These few representative comments signal at the ugly side of body- and fat-shaming practices on the Internet. These derogatory remarks are manifestation of a consciousness that is prevalent in patriarchal societies where men do not think twice before hurling abuses at women. But West did not deter. Her defiance against these hate crimes grew even stronger. She began to understand very important lessons in life:

Women matter. Women are half of us. When you raise every woman to believe that we are insignificant, that we are broken, that we are sick, that the only cure is starvation and restraint and smallness; when you pit women against one another, keep us shackled by shame and hunger, obsessing over our flaws rather than our power and potential; when you leverage all of that to sap our money and our time—that moves the rudder of the world. It steers humanity toward conservatism and walls and the narrow interests of men, and it keeps us adrift in waters where women's safety and humanity are secondary to men's pleasure and convenience. (23)

The energy and pure confidence of these essays may suggest that West has been this kind of assumed feminist heroine her entire life. But her memoir reveals that the process was not intuitive, but learned over a long time (Hopkins 1). It is also a battle of a self-aware, undefeatable spirit against a culture that demands women to be small, quiet, submissive and tolerant. Slowly but surely she came to the realization that "My body . . . was an opportunity. It was political. It moved the world just by existing. What a gift" (67). West did not give in to the pressure and humiliation she faced online. She talked back to these evil spirits because

[I]t emboldens other women to talk back online and in real life, and I talked back because women have told me that my responses give them a script for dealing with monsters in their own lives. Most importantly, I talked back because Internet trolls are not, in fact, monsters. They are human beings, who've lost their way, and they just want other people to flounder too—and I don't believe that their attempts to dehumanize me can be counteracted by dehumanizing them. (162).

West's life philosophy ingrained in these lines represents both her greatness in forgiving her offender and her determination to fight against such evil for greater good. Her resistance began the moment she decided to accept her body and continue her personal and professional life despite all the detractors.

A close cultural reading of West's text reveal that popular cultural platforms such as magazine, TV shows or online forums can be taken as a site where meaning and dominant ideologies can be constructed and subverted. As John Storey states, "popular culture is a concept of ideological contestation and variability, to be filled and emptied, articulated and disarticulated, in a range of different and competing ways" (10). In this sense, personal narratives and blogs as popular cultural practices also have become a space for raising voice of resistance. Through her strong voice, West attempts to shift mainstream attitude about body image, comedy and online harassment. She indicates that the world is malleable and little efforts to fight against the gendered culture are a process of "world-building" (171). With wit, humour, respect and vulnerability west stands for what she believes and makes a call to "build it [the world] right now, in real time" (171). She believes that the cultural practice should not diminish the voice of women; instead it should be encouraging to unravel their potential. In this way, West has turned the table on popular culture by using it as a site of resistance through magazine stories, TV debate, stand-up comedy and blogging.

Just like West, the onset of Internet revolution has given women more freedom to speak their mind without the fear of censorship or editorship. As a result, bloggers like Caitlin Lansing and Aviva Dove-Viebahn have started to speak out against many gender-related social issues including gender inequalities and sexual objectification via blogs and social media platforms.

Reviewing pop singer Taylor Swift's video for her song "Bad Blood," Caitlin Lansing argued in her blog, *About-Face*, that "the scantily-clad women in the video were devalued from being strong warriors to being traditionally sexy females with bodies that exist to be objectified" (1). She was against "dictation of style that keeps pushing women towards becoming just bodies" (1). Her stance is clear: she opposes views that "scantily-clad" bodies are liberated; they, she opines, rather reinforce sexual objectification of women (1). In "Adolescents' Exposure to a Sexualized Media Environment" Jochen Peter and Patti M. Valkenburg argue that "exposure to sexually explicit material . . . [on] on-line movies was . . . significantly related to beliefs that women are sex objects (382). Caitlin's views make total sense.

The practice of foregrounding mere appearance devalues the intellectual aspect of a person thereby resulting in objectification and sexualization of their bodies. Lansing expresses her frustration that even women who we look up to as role-models are "objectified" (1). In her blog "The False Empowerment of Naked Dress" she argues that the current trend of emphasizing on nudity perpetuates the idea that "talented women . . . keep resorting to corporeal attention to make headlines" (1). She argues that excessive body exposure in the name of empowerment is illusive; this gives a false sense of "empowerment" to the women who are already independent and successful (1). This further creates a wrong impression to other women who look up to them as a role model that bodily appearance is the parameter of success and fame.

Furthermore, Lansing argues that the trend of nudity and objectification is flourishing in our culture in the name of empowerment and freedom. She writes "the fact that men are routinely seen as more empowered when fully clothed, particularly in a nice suit or uniform also sheds a light of concern over what we expect of women" (1). Her point: popular cultural forms often disempower women, giving the

impression that physical attributes are the sole criteria for success. She points out that objectification has been ubiquitous and normal that "no longer must women just be naked on a beach – now it's acceptable, and on the verge of expected, to show off everything on a red carpet" (1). Her remark implies that now we have come to the point that sexism has become acceptable because it happens all the time. It only pushes women to be bodies.

It is undeniable that objectification and sexism practiced in popular cultural forms have been equated with the assertion of unbridled freedom making it acceptable and harmless. Under this cloak, women seem to sustain sexist stereotype. Along these lines, Bordo claims that, "many, if not most, women also are willing (often, enthusiastic) participants in cultural practices that objectify and sexualize us" (28). Her argument is clear: women are conditioned to equate objectification in the name of freedom and empowerment. Lansing's blog has influenced many into thinking that empowerment does not come only from freedom to wear but with the liberation of thought from preoccupation of ideologically-controlled gendered stereotypes and inequalities. One of the readers and responders of the blog in question, Roger Snyder, writes: "Would we see men who were in public mostly naked as 'empowered'? We mostly see them as perverts, and arrest them for indecent exposure. Even if they were movie stars at galas, empowered is not likely the first thing that would come to mind. I think your points are well made" (1). The scale of influence of Lansing's blog is virtually unlimited as Internet is a global phenomenon and provides uncensored access to majority of the citizens from across the globe. That is her contribution to the fight against patriarchy.

Lansing's activism of social resistance against gendered stereotypes and sexual objectification has the potential to change society to unprecedented level. Given that

gendered practices are enforced on people from an early age, being aware of this during that stage of life via mass media such as Internet can help change the social currents to the right direction by bringing gender consciousness to young minds. At the same time, it encourages others who face sexual stigmatization to speak out against such practices. This helps create a virtual community of people that can be a force to reckon with in the long run, effecting change in gender perceptions.

Lansing's contemporary Dove-Viebahn, another female blogger under *Ms. Magazine*, encourages the act of recognizing media objectification and speaking out against such culture. In her blog titled "Future of Feminism: No More Media Sexualization of Women" she argues that sexual objectification is "everywhere, from Carl's Jr. ads to films supposedly meant to empower women" (1). Dove-Viebahn's mission is identical to Lansing's in that both bloggers try to bring the widely pervasive gendered perceptions to the notice of young girls. Because social media is widely popular among this generation, their using of this platform has the potential to yield desired results i.e. to raise consciousness about gender equality and bring body positivity.

With no surprise, such online activism of Dove-Viebahn is often met with hostile and derogatory responses from some of the male readers. Ironically, however, this proves her whole point. This helps them reinforce her message to the target audience with great effectiveness. Dove-Viebahn's blog "Future of Feminism: No More Media Sexualization of Women" dated 3/9/2012 triggers varied responses from her readers. With total 18 comments till the access date, 16 (mostly women) are very supportive whereas two (men) are hostile towards her views. Dave expresses his frustration seeing women unnecessarily paranoid and aggressive toward men due to media projection. He writes witnessing an innocent male like him without any slight

hint of provocation, "Average women ... expect the worst or a sexually violent attack, what is wrong with this society?" (1). This is just an example of intolerance on part of the patriarchal society whose idea of a just society is status quo. When Dove-Viebahn aims to "free girls from the confines of a toxic culture" she herself is subjected to the existing sexism in our culture (1). The social media which seems to give agency and voice to the women also gives room for people to emphasize artificial and constructed nature of ideals of seductive and sexualized femininity.

The issues that bloggers like Dove-Viebahn raise are just tip of an iceberg that need proper political and social addressing. Their fight is not just against a male mentality but against a system that works for the greater advantage of a select few. The fight is not just against a social system but also an economic system that commodifies women in the guise of empowerment. Such capitalist practice is widespread in popular cultural forms such as fashion and social media. For instance, when the reality star and celebrity Kim Kardeashain posts her nude selfies on social media stating "an act of empowerment", she is sexualizing herself in the name of empowerment. In this very act the boundary between sexual empowerment and sexual objectification has been blurred. And with the male fan base she creates through her body, she sells products through advertisement and endorsement. On the other hand, ordinary women begin hating their bodies in desperate attempt to look Kardeashain-like because, for them, being like her is being liked and being successful. The nexus between capitalism and illusionary women empowerment is unmissable.

However, there is always a brighter side to this entire dark picture. The right approach to dealing with this age-old social evil is through the assertion of one's agency and resistance. The patterns of voice of resistance, just as Dove-Viebahn's, question the objectification of women for generating aesthetic pleasure. According to

Lana F. Rakow, "understanding how popular culture functions both for women and for a patriarchal culture is important if women are to gain control over their own identities and change both social mythologies and social relation" (202). It is crucial to uncover the obscurities that lie in the construction of popular cultural forms. Acknowledging and raising voice against the sexualized economy paves the way for actual freedom.

Viebahn's blog has created a platform to discuss the issue, share experience and finding a voice which will slowly but surely challenge these practices. In this sense popular culture has become a site where the meaning once established can be challenged. There is always the possibility of ideological tussle to destroy what is created, to articulate and disarticulate. The voice raised through such narratives and personal blogs can have political functions of resistance and consciousness generation. As Chris Barker opines, "resistance is not a quality of an act but a category of judgment about acts. It is a judgment that classifies the classifier" (171). It aims to analyze and bring to light the existing injustice and social problems. In the words of Bell Hooks, "coming to voice . . . speaking becomes both a way to engage in active self transformation and a rite of passage where one moves from being object to being subject" (12). Narratives and blogs can be a crucial site to critically examine and analyze the details of production, patterns of consumption and gaps of popular cultural practice.

Popular culture has come to be a site where male monopoly is practiced by virtually blurring the boundary between sexism and sexuality. It has also become a space for capitalism to perpetuate unjust gender-based labor practices. This is because; the projection of women in the popular culture is carried out from the perspective of capitalist, heterosexual men where members of society consume such

projections as normative gender practices. Interestingly enough, these popular cultural forms have also provided space for women to resist, contest and renegotiate such ideologies to effect change in these practices. In this sense, personal narratives and blogs can be crucial sites to critically examine and analyze gender normativity and gender-based labor practices in popular culture. The practice of observing, realizing, sharing, discussing and encouraging these dissenting voices on such cultural forums carries the potential to subvert such hegemonic ideologies.

Therefore, it is vitally important that these personal spaces are taken into consideration for serious critical academic discussions in order to help these efforts come to fruition. This recognition of injustice and its roots can challenge the phallogocentric as well as capitalist ideology and practices. When such personal expressions are given more space and taken as worthy subject of academic discussion, the rigid notions of gender and gender-based labor existing in our cultural practice can be questioned and transformed, making way for a just and tolerant society.

Works Cited

- Arnold, Matthew. *Culture and Anarchy*. Cambridge UP, 1960. Print.
- Barker, Chris. *Making Sense of Cultural Studies*. Sage Publication, 2002. Print.
- Barrett, Michele. *Women's Oppression Today: Problems in Marxist Feminist Analysis*. Schocken Books, 1986. Print.
- Basilieri, Jenna. "Outside the Binary: Transgendered Politics on a Global Stage". *The Politics of Inclusion and Exclusion: Identity Politics in Twenty-First Century America*, edited by David F. Ericson, Routledge, 2011, pp:141-42.
- Batson, Heather. "Shaming Obesity." *Contexts*, vol. 12, no. 3, 2013, pp. 8–8.
- Benjamin, Walter. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction". *Critical Theory since 1965*, edited by Hazard Adams and Leroy Searle, Florida State UP, pp. 248-268.
- Bhasin, Kamala. *Understanding Gender*. Kali for Women, 2000. Print.
- Bordo, Susan. *The Male Body: A Look at Men in Public and in Private*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999. Print.
- Brewis, Alexandra A, et. al. "Body Norms and Fat Stigma in Global Perspective." *Current Anthropology*, vol. 52, no. 2, April 2011, pp. 269-276.
- Browne, Ray & Pat Browne. *Profiles of Popular Culture*. University of Wisconsin Press, 2005.
- Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble*. Routledge, 2001. Print.
- Cashmore, Ellis. *Celebrity Culture*. Routledge, 2006. Print.
- Cohen, Sascha. "Flesh and Bones: Pornography and High Fashion as Complementary Mediums for the Dehumanization of Women". *Off Our Backs*, vol. 37, no. 1, 2007, pp. 35-36.

- Dauxerre, Victoire. *Size Zero: How I Survived My Life as a Model*. Translated by Andy Bliss, Harpercollins, 2016. Print.
- Dave. Comment on "Future of Feminism: No More Media Sexualization of Women". *Ms Magazine*, 21 Oct., 2013, 9:49 p.m., msmagazine.com/blog/2012/03/09/future-of-feminism-no-more-media-sexualization-of-women/.
- Dove-Viebahn, Aviva. "Future of Feminism: No More Media Sexualization of Women." *Ms. Magazine*, March 9, 2012, msmagazine.com/blog/2012/03/09/future-of-feminism-no-more-media-sexualization-of-women/.
- Dunn, James. Review of *Size Zero: How I Survived My Life as a Model*, by Victoire Dauxerre. *Dailymail*, Dec. 19, 2018, dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-4167094/Top-catwalk-model-reveals-starved-herself.html.
- Eisenstein, Zillah. *Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism*. Monthly Review Press, 1978.
- Evans, Caroline and Minna Thornton. "Fashion, Representation, Femininity". *Feminist Review*, no. 38, 1991, pp. 48-66.
- Fiske, John. *Understanding Popular Culture*. UnwinHyman, 1989. Print.
- Fishwick, Marshall. *Seven Pillars of Popular Culture*. Greenwood Press, 1985.
- Friedan, Betty. *The Feminine Mystique*. Dell, 1977. Print.
- Green, Keith and Jill LeBihan. *Critical Theory and Practice: A Coursebook*. Routledge, 1996. Print.
- Gurumurthy, Anita, and Niveditha Menon. "Violence against Women via Cyberspace." *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 44, no. 40, 2009, pp. 19–21.

- Hackman, Rose. "Are You Beach Body Ready?" *The Guardian News*, 27 June 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2015/jun/27/beach-body-ready-america-weight-loss-ad-instagram>.
- Hall, Stuart, "Notes on Deconstruction 'the Popular'". *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader*, edited by John Storey. Pearson Education, 2009. Print.
- Harris-More, Deborah. *Media and the Rhetoric of Body Perfection*. AshgatePublisher, 2014. Print.
- Hebdige, Dick. *Hiding in the Light*. Routledge, 1988. Print.
- Homme, Joseph Prud. "Pop Culture and the Male Body: A New Challenge." *The Public Discourse*, 21 July, 2015, thepublicdiscourse.com/2015/07/15310/.
- Hooks, Bell. "Postmodern Blackness". *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader*, edited by John Storey, Pearson Education, 2009. Print.
- Hopkins, Christine. Review of *Shrill: Notes From a Loud Woman* by Lindy West. *Iowastatedaily*, May 27, 2016, iowastatedaily.com/features/book-review-shrill-notes-from-a-loud-woman-is-insightful-empowering/article_58d78e8a-2482-11e6-b1df-87c366b3b389.html.
- Horkheimer, Max and Theoder W. Adorno. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Stanford University Press, 1944. Print.
- Kennedy, Liz and June Lapidus. Review of *Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism*, by Zillah Eisenstein. *Feminist Studies*, vol. 6, no. 3, 1980, pp. 571-582.
- "Killing Us Softly: 4 Advertising's Images of Women." *YouTube*, uploaded by openedmieyez, 7 Feb, 2018, www.youtube.com/watch?v=xnAY6S4_m5I.
- Kilbourne, Jean, et. al. *So Sexy So Soon*. Ballatine Books, 2009. Print.

- Lansing, Caitlin. "The False Sense of Naked Dress". *About-Face.blog*, Aug 12, 2015, about-face.org/the-false-empowerment-of-naked-dresses/.
- Maase, Kaspar. "‘Popular Culture, ‘Resistance,’ ‘Cultural Radicalism,’ and ‘Self-Formation’: Comments on the Development of a Theory.'" *Resistance: Subjects, Representations, Contexts*, edited by Martin Butler et. al., Transcript Verlag, 2017, pp. 45–70.
- Marx, Karl. *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*. Progress Publishers, 1859. Print.
- Mills, Eleanor. Review of *Size Zero: My Life As a Disappearing Model* by Victoire Dauxerre, *TheSundayTimes.com*, February 05 2017, 12.01am, www.thetimes.co.uk/article/books-size-zero-my-life-as-a-disappearing-model-by-victoire-dauxerre-nd7d68v76.
- Moi, T. "Feminist Literacy Criticism". *Modern Literary Theory: A Comparative Introduction*. Edited by Ann Jefferson and David Robey, Batsford Ltd, 1998. Print.
- Mojab, Shahrzad. *Marxism and Feminism*. Zed Books, 2015. Print.
- Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." *Visual and Other Pleasures*. Palgrave Macmillan, 1989, pp. 14-26. Print.
- Peronnet, Valerie. Review of *Size Zero: My Life as a Disappearing Model* by Victoire Dauxerre. *Goodreads.com*, 25 June, 2017, www.goodreads.com/book/show/33295525-size-zero.
- Peter, Jochen and Patti M. Valkenburg. "Adolescents' Exposure to a Sexualized Media Environment and Their Notions of Women as Sex Objects." *Sex Roles*, v. 56, February 2007, pp. 381-395.

- Rakow, Lana F. "Feminist Approaches to Popular Culture: Giving Patriarchy Its Due." *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader*, edited by John Storey, Pearson Education, 2006. Print.
- Reeves, Hazel and Sally Baden. "Gender and Development: Concepts and Definitions." *The Bridge Report 55*, Institute of Development Studies, 2000.
- Roberts, Tomi-Ann and Barbara L. Fredrickson. "Objectification Theory: Toward Understanding Women's Lived Experience and Mental Health Risks." *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, vol. 21, no. 1, 1997, pp. 173-206, *Researchgate*. Web.
- Secor, Anna and Banu Gokarıksel. "The Veil, Desire, and the Gaze: Turning the Inside Out". *Signs*, vol. 40, no. 1, 2014, pp. 177-200.
- Sewell, Samantha. "Feminism 101: What is the Commodification of Femininity?" *Femmagazine*, December 17, 2016, femmagazine.com/feminism-101-what-is-the-commodification-of-femininity/.
- Sewell, William H. Jr. "The Empire of Fashion and the Rise of Capitalism in Eighteenth-Century France". *Past & Present*, no. 206, February 2010, pp. 81-120.
- Slvia Walby, *Theorizing Patriarchy*. Basil Blackwell, 1990. Print.
- Snyder, Roger. Comment on "The False Empowerment of Naked Dresses." *About-face.org*, August 12, 2015, 07:32 pm, about-face.org/the-false-empowerment-of-naked-dresses/.
- Storey, John. *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader*. Pearson Education, 2009.

- Tan, David. "The Fame Monster Reloaded: The Contemporary Celebrity, Cultural Studies and Passing Off." *Singapore Journal of Legal Studies*, July 2010, pp. 151-176.
- Taylor, Paul, et. al. *Sociology in Focus*. The Bath Press, 2000. Print.
- Trokhimenko, Olga V. "*Constructing Virtue and Vice: Femininity and Laughter in Courtly Society*". V&R Unipress, 2014.
- Tyson, Lois. *Critical Theory Today*. Routledge, 2006. Print.
- Valenti, Jessica. *Sex Object: A Memoir*. HarperCollins, 2016. Print.
- Van Laer, Tom. "The Means to Justify the End: Combating Cyber Harassment in Social Media." *Journal of Business Ethics*, vol. 123, no. 1, 2014, pp.
- van Praagh, Anna. Review of *Size Zero: My Life as a Disappearing Model* by Victoire Dauxerre, *Standard.com*, 2 February 2017, www.standard.co.uk/lifestyle/books/size-zero-my-life-as-a-disappearing-model-by-victoire-dauxerre-with-val-rie-p-ronnet-translated-by-a3457291.html.
- Wareing, Charlotte, "Kim Kardashian Furiously Defends Herself". *IrishMirror*, 9 March, 2016, www.irishmirror.ie/showbiz/celebrity-news/kim-kardashian-furiously-defends-herself-7521051.
- West, Lindy. *Shrill: Notes From a Loud Woman*. Hhachette Books, 2016. Print.