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İSTANBUL YENİ YÜZYIL UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE PROGRAMME

REDEFINING GENDER POLICIES IN *THE AWAKENING* BY KATE CHOPIN AND *THE HOUSE OF MIRTH* BY EDITH WHARTON IN THE LIGHT OF SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR'S THE SECOND SEX: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

MA THESIS

Zahraa ABD ALI
19131306926

İSTANBUL, September 2021

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SUPERVISOR

ASSOC. PROF. SAMAN HASHEMIPOUR

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INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

THESIS APPROVAL PAGE

Zahraa Abd Ulhasan Abd Ali Abd Ali, who is a graduate student at the Department of English Language and Literature and whose student number is **19131306926** has presented her thesis titled "**Redefining Gender Policies in *The Awakening* by Kate Chopin and *The House of Mirth* by Edith Wharton in the Light of Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*: A Comparative Study**" -and it has been accepted by the jury approved by the Institute of Social Sciences on 03/09/2021 by its decision numbered 2021 /07 as an MA Thesis unanimously / by the majority of voting.

Thesis Defense Date: 08/09/2021

Name-Surname		**Signature**
Thesis Supervisor	Assoc. Prof. Saman Hashemipour	
Jury Member	Assoc. Prof. Timuçin Buğra Edman	
Jury Member	Asst. Prof. Sevilay Yavuz Çeşmeci	

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ETHICAL STATEMENT

In this project, I prepared my manuscript in accordance with the thesis writing rules of the Institute of Social Sciences at Istanbul Yeni Yüzyıl University and I hereby declare that;

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8 / 9/ 2021

Zahraa Abd Ali

PREFACE

I would like to thank my supervisor, Assoc. Prof.Dr. Saman HASHEMIPOUR for his patience, support, understanding, and guidance at every stage of this dissertation. He was always available when I needed his guidance without delay. I am deeply grateful for his constructive academic guidance. Working with him is such a great honor. Besides my advisor, I would like to thank the rest of my thesis committee, Assoc. Prof.Timucin EDMAN and Dr.Sevilay ÇEŞMECI for their invaluable insights and recommendations. Their precious comments, suggestions helped this study to take on its final shape. I would also like to express my sincere thankfulness and earnest gratitude to Prof. Dr. Günseli İŞÇİ for her guidance and during two semesters. I would like to thank Dr. Olgahan BAKŞİ YALÇIN for her guidance, help, and advice during my studies.

Finally, and most importantly, I am eternally grateful to my parents for their support, caring, and prayers, who always offered their unconditional and endless love. And if words are ever enough to express my appreciation, I would like to thank my dear husband, Prof. Dr. Ahmed HAMEED, for his help, encouragement, understanding, and support, this academic journey would not have been possible without his love and patience. I would like to thank my brother and sisters for their love and support. I am also thankful and indebted to my beloved sister Lamees for her help and support during the journey of my study. I wish to thank my beloved and a beautiful daughter Dalya and Lamar and wonderful sons Mohaimen and Abbas, who provide unending inspiration and love. Finally, my thanks go to all the people and friends who have supported me to complete the research work directly or indirectly.

İSTANBUL,2021 Zahraa ABD ALI

CONTENTS

THIRD CHAPTER

ÖZET

SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR'IN İKİNCİ CİNSİYET'İ IŞIĞINDA TOPLUMSAL CİNSİYET POLİTİKALARININ YENİDEN TANIMLANMASI: KATE CHOPIN'IN UYANIŞ VE EDITH WHARTON'IN KEYİF EVİ

Bu tez, erkek egemen toplumlarda, kadın karakterlerin çektiği acıları Kate Chopın'ın *Uyanış* ve Edith Wharton'ın *Keyif Evi* Romanlarında incelemektedir. Karşılaştırma sayesinde, *Uyanış* ve *Keyif Evi*'nin baş kahramanları arasındaki farklılıkları ve benzerlikleri sergilemektedir. Bu tez, Feminizmin savunduğu tüm alanlarda beklediği eşit hak ve katılımı destekleyerek, dünya çapında, kadınlara yönelik baskıyı sona erdirme çabalarını tartışmaktadır. Ayrıca, Simone de Beauvoir'ın *İkinci Cinsiyet*'teki tartıştığı erkek egemen bir toplumda cinsiyet eşitsizliği hakkında bakış açısı da yorumlanmaktadır. Bu araştırma, iki romandaki toplumsal cinsiyet, baskı, annelik, evlilik, toplumun annelik ve evlilikten beklentilerini ve kahramanların intiharlarının ardındaki nedenleri derinlemesine analiz etmektedir. Bu çalışma, toplumsal cinsiyet eşitsizliğinin, roman kahramanlarının yaşam ve davranışlarının nasıl etkilendiğini ve onların toplumun normlarına ve beklentilerine yönelik isyan etmelerine sebebiyet verdiğini doğrulamaktadır. Bu romanlarda, toplum, kadınların esas mesleğinin çocuklarını sevmek ve kocalarına itaat etmek olup, anne ve eş olarak ev işleriyle sınırlı kalmalarını istemektedir. Dolayısıyla kadınlar, özellikle de kadın kahramanlar, ataerkil toplumun ön kabullerinden kurtaramadıklarında ve haklarını alamadıkları dönemde, intiharı bir kurtuluş yolu olarak tercih etmektedirler.

Zahraa ABD ALI,2021

Anahtar Kelimeler: Cinsiyet, Simone de Beauvoir, Kadınların manevi özgürlüğü, Kate Chopin, Edith Wharton

ABSTRACT

REDEFINING GENDER POLICIES IN *THE AWAKENING* BY KATE CHOPIN AND *THE HOUSE OF MIRTH* BY EDITH WHARTON IN THE LIGHT OF SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR'S *THE SECOND SEX*: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

This thesis highlights the suffering of female characters in a male-dominated society in *The Awakening* (1899) by Kate Chopin and *The House of Mirth* (1905) by Edith Wharton. The comparison comprises differences and similarities between protagonists of *The Awakening* and *The House of Mirth*. This thesis discusses the efforts of Feminism to end the oppression of females worldwide to promote equal rights and participation in all fields. It also focuses on Simone de Beauvoir's perspective in *The Second Sex* for interpreting gender inequality in a male-dominated society. In addition, the significance of this research lies in the profound analysis of gender, oppression, motherhood, marriage, society's expectations of motherhood and marriage, and the reasons behind the protagonists' suicides in the two novels. The study confirms that gender inequality played an essential role in affecting the lives and behavior of the protagonists of the novel, which led to their rebellion against the norms and expectations of society. Society believes that women's occupation is chiefly restricted to household duties as mothers and wives to love their children and worship their husbands. Thus, when women—particularly protagonists—fail to liberate themselves from the presuppositions of patriarchal society and cannot obtain their rights, they opt for committing suicide as a means of salvation.

Zahraa ABD ALI,2021

Keywords: Gender, Simone de Beauvoir, Spiritual Liberation of Women, Kate Chopin, Edith Wharton

INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, women have struggled to get respect, equality, and the same rights as men in society. However, it is difficult for women to get their rights because of patriarchy, a concept in which men are always regarded as superior to women and have the right to exert control over them. This notion has spread widely throughout society's social institutions and has complicated things further for women to be able to attain feminist ambitions. However, though feminism's history is complex, the most plausible explanation for its beginnings is a desire to change women's lives. Feminist theory focuses on the understanding of gender inequalities and gender politics. Feminist political action frequently campaigns on women violence, reproductive rights, equal pay with men, and child-care leave. The patriarchy, stereotyping, and oppression are all themes examined in feminism.

This work concentrates on feminism in America during the late nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century. At that time, women's economic, political and social prospects for progress in the US along with their roles in society were changing drastically. Women were considered subordinate to males in the years preceding the American Revolution. Men made rules, regulations, and laws and imposed them on women, and they lived contingent upon these. Women's roles included marriage, care of children, and fulfilling their responsibilities as wives and mothers. Due to society's male-dominated structure, women did not have rights like voting or owning property.

At the turn of the nineteenth century, feminist ideas and attitudes supporting women's rights extended throughout America. Women sought gender equality but ended up with male dominance. However, after the 1850s, feminist concepts and the women's movement gained prominence. After years of suffering and injustice, women are now playing a significant role in society as politicians, socialists, and

economists. These accomplishments are made possible by the advent of feminism, which grants women's rights.

Feminism is a theory or philosophy that advocates for equal rights amongst men and women in the economy, politics, and social spheres. Additionally, it can be regarded as a revolution in which men and women are treated equally without barriers. Feminists believe that all people are equal regardless of their age, gender, class, or economic condition. Feminism is a concept that refers to women's battle for equality with men and to be valued members of society. From the eighteenth century to the present day, feminists have organized to eradicate the notion that men are superior to women.

Feminists have sought to demonstrate that social injustice is not predetermined by God or nature but rather is the outcome of society's conditions that can and should be corrected. Feminists advocate for legal, political, educational, and other reforms that will empower women to choose lives that align with their interests and talents rather than those imposed by society, church, or tradition. So those women have more options in life than only being wives or mothers. After a long journey of improving the world by creating new rules and changing old concepts and beliefs, women are still fighting for their rights. Feminism has sparked a worldwide debate, intending to solve women's problems and stop their inequitable treatment. Feminism is the voice of women when they cannot speak or convey their feelings or desires.

Literature plays a significant role in society's development. It shapes civilizations, alters political systems, and brings injustice to light. It is widely known that literature reflects society, both through positive and negative values. Literature's purpose is to reflect society's faults to make society aware of its errors and make repairs. As literature is viewed as a cultural feature, it so reflects current events and human experiences. Previously, Victorian literature represented American society's realities. It was a patriarchal society that restricted women's roles in the home. Thus, literature reflected this concept in the sense that male authors dominated literary works. Women were portrayed as emotional, illogical creatures who distracted male actors. As an imitation of human action, literature frequently depicts what individuals think, say, and do in society. Additionally, it portrays the virtues or positive values

prevalent in society for others to emulate. Over the years, novels have been used to address various issues, transforming into a tool for influencing various societies worldwide.

This study depends on the perspectives and opinions of many writers who have written about *The Awakening* and *The House of Mirth.* One of these writers is Öznur Yemez whose article titled as "Loss of Self and the Struggle for Individuality in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*"; examines Kate Chopin's masterpiece. Her study discusses female identity, loss of self, womanhood vision, women oppression, mother-woman figure, and the women's search for autonomy by employing Chodorowian terminology (Yemez, 2013, pp. 6-10). Yemez argues that male-dominated societies legitimize female suffering, generating a feeling of selflessness. As a result, women get exposed to enormous tasks at a very young age and start leading a life that is regarded as significant only in the context of male norms and affected by men's dogma in the physical and spiritual sense. Thus, even though women like to achieve self-awareness and repair their identity fragments, this strong patriarchic male line unjustly penalizes and devastates them. In her article, Edna Pontellier is examined psychoanalytically, using Nancy Chodorow's feminine personality and self-conceptualization ideas.

In "Women's Struggle for Pursuing Happiness in Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth*" *(1905*), this study examines the concept of the pursuit of happiness from two theoretical perspectives: social Darwinism and feminist criticism (Abed, 2017, pp.18-23). Abed 's study intends to concentrate on the status of women in early twentieth-century New York. It also sheds light on the different interpretations by the women in the novel of the concept of happiness and their effort to achieve happiness. In addition, the research utilizes social Darwinism and feminist criticism to highlight the obstacles faced by women, particularly the patriarchal social standards that control the upper class. Finally, this study examines the importance of themes culture and society in defining women's identities and the structure of their way of life. In contrast to men, women are heavily influenced by society since it restrains their liberties and grants men superiority over women.

Kadry (2012), in his thesis, "Discourse and Identity in *Antigone, The Awakening,* and *The House of Mirth*", argues that identity is a presupposed concept that refers to the intrinsic characteristics or beliefs of an individual (pp. 7-11). However, utilizing Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of dialogism and discourse, Kadry purports that the identity represented in *Antigone, The Awakening,* and *The House of Mirth* is the result of social experience, not something ingrained within. Each text's main female character builds a discourse to which each character remains devoted despite social adversity. At the same time, their suicides may stop their societal engagement, but both their demises and discourses with their ethical reverberations have a significant effect on the prospective perspectives of the characters that are introduced later in each book. In addition, each author engages in a deep conversation with their audience by choosing death for their female protagonist, emphasizing the moral value that connects with the reader because each novel reflects his contemporary social hierarchy and norms.

The studies mentioned above discuss themes of the mother-woman figure, feminine identity, womanhood vision, loss of self, women's oppression, the women's struggle for autonomy, the pursuit of happiness, culture, and society in defining women's identities and themes of identity in *The Awakening* and *The House of Mirth*. The studies above apply different theories according to different thinkers such as Nancy Chodorow's feminine personality and self-conceptualization ideas, social Darwinism and Feminist criticism, or Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of dialogism and discourse. However, the themes, theories, and thinkers that I discuss and present in my thesis differ from the above studies. This thesis undertakes a comparative study in gender issues between novels, *The Awakening* by Kate Chopin and *The House of Mirth* by Edith Wharton, from Simone de Beauvoir's perspective.

The reason behind selecting this topic is to shed light on women's problems and their struggles against patriarchal society. This study aims to highlight the struggle of the female characters in *The Awakening* and *The House of Mirth* and compare these two novels in terms of gender issues. This research is significant due to its profound analysis of issues like women's struggles, liberation from gender and oppression, societies' motherhood and marriage expectations, and the reasons that

lead the protagonists to commit suicide. It also details Simone de Beauvoir's perspective in *The Second Sex* for interpreting gender.

This work studies women's struggle and oppression by patriarchal society. It also discusses feminism's efforts to end women's oppression throughout the world and advocate for her equal rights and presence in all fields. This study investigates and expects to answer these questions: What is the role of gender and oppression in *The Awakening* and *The House of Mirth*? How is the expectation of society in motherhood and marriage affect the protagonists of the novels? What are the reasons that lead Edna and Lily to commit suicide? Moreover, what are the differences and similarities between the two novels?

The House of Mirth (1905) by Edith Wharton and *The Awakening* (1899) by Kate Chopin depict the lives of American women both in the late nineteenth and at the beginning of the twentieth century. *The Awakening* and *The House of Mirth* portray female protagonists' journeys going beyond the limits in a male-dominated world. These journeys are also reflections of the writers' own lives who try to free themselves off their gender constraints. Both Edna and Lily are commitment to an identity in order to reach their goals and preserve their values. The women characters in *The Awakening* and *The House of Mirth* experience various events and incidents and get affected by them as someone who belongs to middle or upper-class society.

Kate Chopin is an American 19th century controversial writer. *The Awakening* was published in 1899; initially unappreciated, it has become a famous and influential work of feminism after she passed away. The novel portrays a married woman who desires sexual relationships other than her husband, and thereby, the critics of the book give her a severe reprimand because they think that she does not understand how important the role of a mother is for her kids than gratifying her desire. *The Awakening* is even more radical in dealing with maternity. It contradicts the preconceptions that birth and childcare are the primary vocations of a woman, and that maternity pleases all women. Edna was viewed as a social construct-breaking hero by second-wave feminists in the 1960s when the story was rediscovered. The second-wave feminist movement was dominated by educated white women from the middle to upper classes, while working-class women and

women of color were marginalized. A feminist interpretation of *The Awakening* from the second wave can readily empathize with Edna and support her in her struggle to attain individual independence from the harsh patriarchal society that enslaves her.

It is vital to understand Kate Chopin's life and her circumstances to better comprehend why she wrote *The Awakening*. Women had more impact on her life than men. Strong women surrounded her, and her family was strongly matriarchal. Chopin, her mother, and grandmother all cherished widowhood as liberty—following the death of their husbands rather than remarriage (Worton, 2008, p.24). Her great-grandmother had an important role in Kate's growth and instilled a love of storytelling in her. Her great-grandmother heavily influenced Chopin's upbringing. By teaching her the piano, she also taught her to be open to new ideas. It is no surprise that women are the topic of most of Kate Chopin's writing, given that she spent so much of her life observing powerful women. Edna is a woman who can use the strength she discovers within herself to protect her identity, which she believes is losing as a result of the rules imposed on her. Chopin aims to construct a woman's simple story rather than women's life in general. In realizing her strength, perhaps Chopin demonstrates the impact of social constraints and emotional conflict on a weaker woman—for there are undoubtedly many women weaker than Kate Chopin.

The American Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth* (1905) critiques early twentieth-century New York's upper-class society, a patriarchal society characterized by widespread female subordination. This society particularly discourages women from doing anything except marriage. In *The House of Mirth,* Wharton presents the gender role, and through Lily's character, she criticizes social expectations of women. It is important to get a sense of American society at the turn of the twentieth century to realize why Edith Wharton emphasizes women. Women had begun to challenge men, and demanded their rights; women were emancipating themselves from the barriers that pushed them into secondary positions. In the final decade of the 19th century, the women's movement began to flourish. Women were demanding the freedom to vote and the ability to leave their homes and make a living. With the women's movement going on all around her, she was undoubtedly aware of the age temper. She belonged to a rigorous, and rich New York society. She grew up in a society that fostered sexual regression and prided itself on the innocence of its young

girls during the Victorian era. It is critical to look at her early influences to understand Edith Wharton's work. (Monique, 2011, p.63)

Wharton's father played an important role in developing her imagination and comprehension. He taught her how to read and create. Edith's father instilled in her a love of literature, poetry, and a sense of sexual awareness. Her mother did not want her daughter, on the other hand, to study some novels of sexual substance. Thus, her father's influence on her was not just a guide for instilling literary tastes in her, but he treated her as a friend and helped her mature in sexual awareness. (Monique, 2011, p.63)

This thesis is divided into three chapters as well the introduction and conclusion. Chapter one is entitled Theoretical Framework: Feminism, and it consists of four parts. Part one is entitled Origins and Developments of Feminism, and it deals with the definition of feminism theory and its origins. Part two, entitled Waves of the Feminist Movement, and consists of four subdivisions: The First Feminist Wave: Women's Right in Voting, The Second Feminist Wave: The Policy of Individuality, The Third Feminist Wave: Transversal Politics, and The Fourth Feminist Wave. Finally, I will explain the goals of each movement.

The first wave of feminism is primarily concerned with how all human beings should be treated equally. The themes are equal pay at work, the right to have an education, women's legal rights, and their right to vote. The second wave of the feminist movement is a continuation of the liberationist movement of the 1960s, which addresses the female experience of sexual discrimination. The second wave focuses on an individualistic but social concept: women's oppression. The third wave of feminism examines the relationship between gender and language and addresses sexism against women in the publishing sector. Feminism's third wave is concerned with ethnic and multicultural issues. It questions the dominant form of white feminism through a compelling narrative that explores several facets of awareness. It is also dramatized as a 1980s uprising, highlighting issues of race, class, and culture. The fourth wave of feminism is focused on women's empowerment and internet usage. The preceding waves fight for advanced women's freedom, individualism, and social mobility; the fourth wave fights against gender inequality.

Part three is entitled Types of Feminism. Feminism has evolved not as a single concept but as a collection of distinct domains, each with distinct title. The most widely used ten distinct feminist theories are anarchist feminism, black feminism, cultural feminism, eco-feminists, equality feminism, Freudian psychoanalysis, liberal feminism, Marxist feminism, radical feminism, postmodern feminism.

Part four is entitled Simone de Beauvoir's Perspective of Feminism; Beauvoir's study focuses on women's struggle. In her book *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir demonstrates how myths contribute significantly to the formation of women and their establishment in the collective consciousness and unconsciousness. Beauvoir points out that myths have historically served as the tool and foundation for most religions and ideologies. *The Bible*, for example, offers the tale of Adam's creation as the main event at the beginning of humankind, followed by Eve as a circumstantial addition embodied in the story of her creation out of Adam's crooked rib. Also, according to the narrative, Eve was created to make Adam happy in his loneliness. Adam is thus not just a symbol of Eve's origin, but also of her fate and existence, as if these tales are founded on Adam's substantive existence and Eve's secondary life. Thus, myths play a crucial part in constructing and formulating the perspectives of society such that women are perceived as inferior.

Beauvoir says that women are accepted by society through marriage and childbirth. The influence of men's dominance in politics, economics, culture, and everything associated with the public sphere is apparent by identifying women only with this function in the private field. In the first place, marriage makes women mothers. In this way, marriage inevitably plays a function for women as mothers and makes them find this duty their first and final cultural and essential role. Marriage, according to Beauvoir's perspective, is a powerful strategy for establishing masculine dominance. Women are utilized as biological and social reproduction instruments and are excluded from public and political activities by this technique. However, the debate over a woman's role and status and the characteristic of her success continues. While a woman is not enslaved by a man, we cannot deny her dependence on him. The masculine domination that legitimizes man's status and

power tries to imply the importance of the mother's appreciation and glorification of her role in natural reproduction through birth, upbringing, care, and cooking.

Chapters two and three answer research questions, apply feminism theory and analyze two novels according to Simone de Beauvoir's perspective. The issues of gender are discussed to achieve the study's objective. Chapter two is entitled Female Problem in *The Awakening*. Chapter three is entitled Women's Struggle in *The House of Mirth*. Both chapters are divided into three parts: Gender and Oppression, Motherhood and Marriage, and Spiritual Liberation of Women. The feminist theory employs a conflict approach and studies the strengthening of gender roles and inequalities, emphasizing patriarchy's role in women's oppression. Feminism considers the patriarchal system as a power structure that helps society sort out its complicated relationships based on male dominance.

Motherhood has historically served as a focal point for denying women's rights and equality and discrimination against them. Many feminists have viewed motherhood as a unifying factor among women. Beauvoir argues about the concept of motherhood that it is false to assert a woman becomes concretely equal to a man through motherhood. Beauvoir identifies parenting as the primary factor contributing to women being viewed as others and tied them to immanence. She believes that women are socialized to view childbearing as central to their lives and fulfill their destiny.

The primary goal of patriarchal culture is to keep women in a subordinate position. As a result, in a patriarchal society, women and men play different roles. Women are only meant to be wives and mothers, love their children, and worship their husbands, but males are expected to be the head of the household, become successful economically and provide for their family. The theme of suicide discusses the reasons that lead the protagonists of the two novels to choose death rather than life. Suicide in literature is not a new phenomenon but has existed for ages. Victorian culture is known mainly for its focus on the death and suicide of women. According to patriarchal views of female suicide, women who struggle against male-constructed societal structures must die.

A successful woman, in patriarchal terms, is a selfless woman who is prepared to submit to patriarchal rules. The death of a woman by her hand indicates that women can deliberately reject society's rigid norms. The death of Edna and Lily appears to be a better option for them than living lives without dignity, oppression, and exploitation. Edna and Lily understand that no matter how much they try to free themselves from social norms, constraints, and patriarchal society, they will never obtain the degree of freedom they desire. Her suicide is thus due to her choice of not wanting to conform to society's expectations. They realize that there is no escape from the patriarchal system.

Indeed, it is unjust to define a woman just by her duty and function as a wife, mother, or beloved to qualify as a real woman. In general, the men now acknowledge the notion that women are the equals of men regarding education and employment, on the other hand insisting that she is always a woman first and foremost, as mentioned previously. Although a woman is educated and employed outside the home, she remains a prisoner of her traditional and mythological status as a mother and housewife. These two irreconcilable roles or inescapable fates keep her in a state of contradiction, hesitancy, and reliance. Working outside the home does not relieve women of their conventional roles or restructure the social division of labor. If a woman chooses to work outside the home, she will have to make double efforts to fulfill her responsibilities. If not, then she will be seen as an unsuccessful woman.

FIRST CHAPTER

1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: FEMINISM

1.1 Origins and Developments of Feminism

The word feminism was transpired in France in the late 1880s by Huburtine Auclert's article, "La Feminité," in *La Citoyenne,* a French feminist newspaper published in France by Auclert herself. The article condemns male dominance and advocates for women's rights and emancipation offered by the French Revolution. In the early twentieth century, the term appeared initially in the United Kingdom and later in the United States of America in the 1910s, before finding use in the 1920s as *Niswia* [feminism] in the Arab world. Feminism derives from "Femina," a Latin word for a woman. As an ideology, it does not concern women as biological entities but rather as a social understanding. Self-proclaimed feminists share the belief that discrimination toward women is related to their sexuality. Due to the biological differences between women and men, women are treated inferior to men in society. Whether feminism is a philosophy, an ideology, or an upheaval in politics, feminism explicitly concentrates on women's experiences and demonstrates the various aspects of injustice that women have experienced in a society (Ghorfati & Medini, 2014, p. 12).

Madsen (2000) explains that "Feminism deals with women and their status in society and asks questions about oppression, consciousness, and gender" (p. 48). Madsen further asserts that feminist theory tackles the unique experience of women throughout history, the concept of female consciousness; the restrictive and oppressive definitions of gender; and the cause of women's liberation from those constraints. Feminism aims to investigate women's social standing, justify their inferiority position in history, and offer a foundation for women's reform and improvement in all aspects of society. Feminists assert that there is a fundamental

struggle for power between men and women. Class and race disputes are examples of this. Indeed, the world's oldest power struggle is the least visible in terms of conflict forms but the deepest in terms of social implications (Madsen, 2000).

The feminist paradigm shows how to identify issues and what kinds of questions arise. For instance, according to the explanation by Parpart (2016), inequality results from "the need to establish unequal incentives to motivate the most talented people to do the most important jobs efficiently in society" (as cited in Halířová, 2016, p.7).

Feminism, whether as a social or political movement, focuses on women's perspectives in their everyday lives. Feminists are constantly reminded of the position of a woman in patriarchal societies. Consequently, they strive to eliminate all obstacles to equal rights and ways of life for women and men and reject the idea that women's worth largely depends on their gender. As defined and integrated into patriarchal systems and societal environments, women are considered inferior, submissive, or less intellectual than men (Ghorfati & Medini, 2014, p. 13). Feminism is a movement for equality between women and men. According to Barker (2004), feminism seeks to examine the position of women in society and further their interests (p. 68). Audi (1999) argues that the purposes of feminists are to understand why women are marginalized, repressed, and oppressed in ways other than men and propose morally acceptable and politically realistic ways of giving women the same justice, independence, and equality granted men (p. 306).

The *Oxford English Dictionary* (2000) uses feminism for the first time in the second half of the nineteenth century and defines feminism as having the qualities of females (p. 30). During the twentieth century, the definition of feminism changes, and it is used to define the theory of the political, economic, and social equality of both genders. Feminism is a "broad movement embracing numerous phases of a woman's emancipation and an all-encompassing freedom for identity-building, unshackled by sex-based norms and oppressive limitations" (Berg, 1979, p. 24). A woman's worth is rooted in her human nature and not in any other paradigms.

Feminism is not a science or philosophy, no faith or doctrine. Kunjakkan (2002) defines it as a movement of women, by women, and for women to achieve

women's rights (p. 87). Feminism aims for gender equality to eliminate oppression, sexism, and subordination. It symbolizes significant changes and transforms culture socially and politically since feminism profoundly challenges the perception of men, women, and the social system that maintains the difference. In the meantime, Joseph (2010) sums up the concept of feminism by Fiorenza as the radical notion that women are people (p. 101).

Tuttle's (1986) feminist ideology asks new questions of old texts (p. 184). To Tuttle (1986), feminist criticism's goals are to develop and uncover a female tradition of writing, to interpret the symbolism of women's writing so that it will not be lost or ignored by the paternal point of view, to rediscover old texts, to analyze women writers and their writings from a female perspective, to resist sexism in literature, and to increase awareness of the sexual politics of language and style (p. 184). Feminism is a domain term about race, gender, class, and sexual orientation that advocates injustice between the genders. However, feminists also work on social changes that might put an end to the injustices against women. James (2003) characterizes the schematic account of feminism as such:

> Feminism is grounded on the belief that women are oppressed or disadvantaged by comparison with men and that their oppression is in some way illegitimate or unjustified. Under the umbrella of this general characterization, there are, however, many interpretations of women and their oppression, so that it is a mistake to think of feminism as a single philosophical doctrine or as implying an agreed political program. James seems here to be using the notions of "oppression" and "disadvantage" as placeholders for more substantive accounts of injustice (both normative and descriptive) over which feminists disagree. (p. 576)

Contemporarily speaking, gender definition remains a controversial issue for society and a basic design about economic and social policies' developmental factors. Development is currently considered for greater welfare and sustainability, which means that future generations' opportunities in the development process cannot be compromised. The lives of both men and women are not excluded from these services. Equality and sustainability are fundamentally connected in this regard. No one will survive when approximately half of the world's population lacks livelihood opportunities and is exhausted. Women's personal, economic, political, and social rights are indivisible human rights, posing critical significance problems. To this end, Spelman (1998) points out the following:

> …no woman is subject to any form of oppression simply because she is a woman, which forms of oppression she is subject to depend on what "kind" of woman she is. In a world in which a woman might be subject to racism, classism, homophobia, antisemitism, if she is not so subject, it is because of her race, class, religion, sexual orientation. So, it can never be the case that the treatment of a woman has only to do with her gender and nothing to do with her class or race. (p. 65)

The feminist theory seeks to understand the nature of gender inequality by examining women's social roles and experiences. In order to do that, it has developed several approaches in various fields better to comprehend the social construction of sex and gender. Some of the earlier forms of feminism have been criticized for considering only white, middle-class, and educated perspectives by-product of these would-be types of feminism dealing with more specific dimensions, whether ethnicity-based or cultural. In a more general sense, the theoretical side of feminism explores gender inequality while focusing on gender politics, dynamics of authority, and sexuality. Other than criticizing the discussed dimensions, the theory promotes women's rights. Gender discrimination, stereotyping, objectification, subjugation, and patriarchal systems are the themes most often scrutinized by feminist theory.

Gender has traditionally been put under two categories as boy or girl, man or woman. A tendency exists in society to mistake the female sex for the female gender, which leads to imposing societal constraints on women's actions and rights. Until the 1960s, gender was only referred to as male or female (Narayan, Chambers, Shah, & Petesch, 2000). In the contemporary sense, however, gender is perceived as a number of guidelines or expectations set by a society that an individual should perform and follow. This itself determines the role of that person. One can be male, or female biologically but still be considered the opposite sex due to how one may think or present themselves (Oakley, 2000). In *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir (1956) purports that such inequalities are bound to happen between the two sexes, but producing miracles together is possible. As a precondition, however, no sex should be enslaved by the other. Men and women are not alike because society defines them. Generally, those men are strong, and women are weak (p. 26).

According to Butler (2007), feminists are against the idea that nature is their destiny; however, he believes that both men and women could create such inclusive

culture that accounts for both male and female species. In that regard, there is no space for choice, inequality, or resistance. Bhasin and Nighat (1999) report that feminism creates a belief in replacing patriarchal, traditional roles and men's supremacy over women. Men and women are similar in terms of social, financial, and political aspects. Sex or gender and patriarchy are two of the main concepts that underlie feminism (p. 76).

1.2. Waves of the Feminist Movement

Throughout its lifetime, the feminist movement has undergone four major waves. Hewitt (2012) states that the propagation of new waves is not meant to recognize distinct eruptions of activism across time (p. 661). In each wave, feminists see themselves as more vital than the waves that precede them, tackling different but connected issues that have to do with the feminine identity and the existence of gender-based distinctions even as emancipation and women's rights were pursued throughout the 1960s and the 1970s (Hewitt, 2012, p. 661).

1.2.1 The First Feminist Wave: Women's Right in Voting

The first wave of the feminist movement was marked in the First World War in the US when National Women's Party (NWP) members made a strike outside the White House. They bore posters and writings about the government's undemocratic policies against women in America in an attempt to demonstrate that they lived in deplorable conditions and that there were no dreams and happiness in the land of dreams. On the other hand, Germany and a few other nations had already taken steps about women's rights. The women were given the right to vote, liberty, and social rights. During this time, the right to vote became the center of discussions amongst women's institutions and organizations worldwide. The NWP at the time stood out for being found odd, abnormal, and even illegal by the US government.

For this reason, many women were imprisoned, including whites and educated women. Women were not permitted to do anything without their husband's and fathers' consent, particularly in public spaces during World War I and World War II (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2018, p. 69). Mainly in all places, this dominance of man

over woman occurred without exception. These events made people judge the woman and gave them a stereotypical image. A woman was rendered into nothing more than a housewife, mother, and wife, and she had to be modest, obeying, and respectful. She also overlooked her biological limitations, such as a smaller brain and a frail physique, which she could cover to guarantee her reproductive abilities. Such segregation made women's rights advocators argue that women had to earn the right to vote. Furthermore, if she had had her rights, such as voting, she would have played her role as a mother and housewife (Faludi, 1991, p. 40).

Many renowned reforming women (activists, feminists) of the early nineteenth century, such as Sojourner Truth, Emma Willard, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, and Margaret Fuller, played a leading role in creating awareness of equal rights, developing and addressing the individual needs of women (Martin, 1987, p. 60). A significant change in focus happened in the twentieth century regarding the use of the term feminism. This significant move was made to differentiate between feminism's purpose and the electoral campaign's first target. The new feminist term ended the women's movement. As a result, a more modern and up-to-date approach started to occur (Cott, 1987, p. 72). *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792), published by Wollstonecraft, is considered a prominent document in the history of the early women's movement since it lays down the foundational values for both men and women's equal endowed rights. In her work, Wollstonecraft (1792) discusses, more particularly, the deplorable state of women during the eighteenth century, the lack of opportunities for education, sexual inequalities, and women's social stereotypes. Wollstonecraft (1792) delivers the following:

> Contending for the rights of woman, my main argument is built on this simple principle, that if she [woman] is not prepared by education [to become the companion of man], she will stop the progress of knowledge and virtue for truth must be common to all. (p. 8)

Wollstonecraft possibly feels that the best way to make women equal to men in society is through preparation. On another note, Virginia Woolf pens her well-known *A Room of One's Own* (1929) on women's rights during the first wave movement, assisting Mary Wollstonecraft and others by finding a new way to improve women's lives. This idea of giving women a new image and position starts to spread worldwide (Malpas, 2014, p. 19). The first wave of feminism is primarily about the

treatment of all human beings equally. The subject revolves around educational and legal rights, the right to vote, and equal pay for women at work. Therefore, the first wave of feminism demonstrates equal opportunities for women in society and focuses on many topics related to sexuality and reproductive rights by creating a forum for women to criticize the marriage institution. Women and children are treated as male property. The fight for human rights and social justice continues between the 1920s and the 1960s. The fighting continues after the 1960s in the form of second-wave feminism. (Krolokke & Sorensen, 2006, p. 62).

1.2.2. The Second Feminist Wave: The Policy of Individuality

The second wave of the feminist movement was arguably a continuation of the liberationist movement that emerged in the 1960s, tackling the female experience regarding sexual discrimination. Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics* (1970) reveals specific points on the patriarchy and the exploitation of women, criticizing renowned authors like D. H. Lawrence, Norman Mailer, and Henry Miller. The second wave concentrates on one concept that is individualistic but societal: women's oppression. Many feminists do not focus on women as readers but seek to establish women's paradigm for coping with the inspiration, examination, and understanding of women's literature. Among the works are *The Female Imagination* (1975) by Spacks, *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing* (1977) by Showalter, and Gubar's *The Mad Woman in the Attic* (1979). The wave is characterized by sexual emancipation of women while handling problems with greater complexity and scope:

> The movement concern itself with a wide array of subjects, from bread-and-butter issues such as workplace and credit equality to such domestic concerns as marriage equality and sexual liberation, to overtly political agendas like electing more women to public office. (Zeitz, 2008, p. 677)

French author and philosopher Beauvoir is another critical figure of the second-wave feminist movement, perhaps most well-known for her influential book, *The Second Sex*. She thoroughly examines women's inequality in this feminist work and sets a standard for contemporary feminism. In *The Second Sex* (1956), she argues that discrimination against women has its origins in women's

social buildings, contributing to the treatment of women as the other. Despite being in line with the first-wave feminists, the second-wave feminists continue many reformist agendas, advocate more radical ideas, actions, and programs (Tong, 1989, p. 23). As a shared knowledge of the dominant patriarchal powers, Snyder frames the second wave. In other words, classic second-wave feminism offers that woman may generate knowledge about their oppression (Snyder, 2008, p. 184). In their philosophies and practices, the second wave of feminists represents diverse aspects of feminism. It involves active involvement by young women and girls born in economic development just before World War II. It was time for girls trained and engaged actively in the civil rights fight and progressive issues relevant to youth cultures. At that time, several women were restored to their conventional positions as full-time women and mothers. Even these women were not as fortunate as the contemporary women so far as their privileges were concerned: they worked for lower wages than men, which created discontent with social and economic influences in women's lives.

Additionally, it increased women's awareness of sexual harassment in society, provoking them to protest. Critical topics for the second wave of feminism are Politics, reproductive rights, and sexual equality of women. Duggan (1995) puts forward the idea that political and cultural battles over sexuality in the 1980s also characterize some of the key feminist debates (p. 1).

1.2.3. The Third Feminist Wave: Transversal Politics

The early 1990s witnessed the rise of the third wave of the feminist movement. Post-feminism or revisionary feminism reflects a significant shift both in the progress of women's movements' goals and in the reaction to the setbacks that second-wave feminism could not overcome. It discusses gender and language relationships and deals with sexism problems against women in the publishing industry. The third wave of feminism deals with ethnic and multicultural dimensions. It questions the prevailing type of white feminism through a strong narration with different aspects of consciousness. It is also staged as a rebellion in the 1980s that poses the problems of race, class, culture, and sexual differences (Dickens & Fontana, 1994, p. 14).

The third wave of feminism deals with the idea of hybridity representing many roles of women and children. This idea leads to a new wave of feminist rebellion linked to a broad spectrum of ethnicity and class experiences. The third wave starts a debate on post-modernism and gives way to a more radical analysis of women's race, religion, and social class disparities. Several younger generations grow up and receive formal education in the 1960s and 1970s during the third wave. Frieze and McHugh (1998) claim that "feminism is a continually evolving construct in that it rejects essentialism and universalism in favor of incorporating reflexivity and multiplicity in its approach" (p. 34).

Similarly, Hooks (2000) claims that "as many versions of feminism as there are women" (p. 40). When considering many different versions, women accept feminist ideals and live their feminist identities; This is why women's perceptions and experiences as feminists must be valued and honored. The third wave of feminism focuses on socio-political and economic viewpoints and class and race rather than biological factors (Baber & Allen, 1992, p. 76). One of the essential socializing elements is the inclusion of women in literature and thus modeling women. Showalter (1977) describes the following four models of difference:

> The biological model is the most extreme; if the text somehow mirrors the body, this can reduce women merely to bodies… Showalter's linguistic model of difference posits women's speaking men's language as a foreign tongue; pursuing the language of sexism is not going far enough. Showalter's psychological model identifies gender difference as the basis of the psyche, focusing on the relation of gender to the artistic process. It stresses feminine difference as the free play of meaning outside the need for closure… Showalter's most important contribution has been to describe the cultural model that places feminist concerns in social contexts. Also, acknowledging class, racial, national, and historical differences and determinants among women, but offering a collective experience that unites women over time and space a binding force. (pp. 199-200)

In the 1990s, it was clear that, with the Girl Power Movements, the third wave of feminism was created to establish a progressive culture for girls and make room for women and girls in society. The third wave sponsored young women and transgender youth while seeking to deal with women's objectification. The third-wave feminist's critical goals were to establish empowered sexuality, define gender identity and violence against women, and women's health needs (Chrisler & McHugh 2011, p. 42). The third wave of feminism condemned both earlier waves for

their lack of commitment to the race, gender, class, and nationality distinctions; even the right to vote that woman gained via the everlasting struggle had been fought for decades to eradicate economic and social justifications. In this regard, Moi (1994) states that the words feminist and feminism were both considered as political labels that helped achieve the goals of the new women's movement, which emerged in the late 1960s (p. 28).

1.2.4. The Fourth Feminist Wave

The fourth wave, set off around the early 2010s, focuses on women's empowerment and internet use. The previous waves campaign for and progress in women's emancipation, individualism, and social mobility; the fourth wave struggles against gender issues. Fourth-wave feminists, much like earlier feminists, support these communities' greater representativeness in politics and industry and claim that society would be more stable if policies and practices embrace all people's viewpoints. Fourth-wave feminism also supports fair pay and equal opportunity for girls and women. It should apply to both men and boys to transcend gender norms, for example, by openly voicing feelings and sentiments, physically expressing themselves as they wish, and engaging parents with their children (Hewitt, 2012, p. 670).

1.3. Types of Feminism

Viewing and analyzing inequality is a crucial element of feminist theory. Most studies about the second wave of feminism deal with efforts to explain and understand the discrimination against women; theories can describe economic dependency, uneven political rights, a lack of education, or the need to extinguish the sense of oppression to regulate sexuality. Theories discuss inequality, such as societal order, labor, economic ties, ecology, political structures, and women's self-understanding. Feminist theory sets itself to understand what is going on in our social lives within different contexts and try to find solutions for problems and struggles women experience (Kolmar & Bartkowski, 2000, p. 20).

Feminism has developed not as a single ideology but in multiple areas, and various labels describe these areas. There are ten widely used distinct feminist theories: anarchist feminism, black feminism, cultural feminism, eco-feminism, equality feminism, radical feminism, Freudian feminism, liberal feminism, Marxist feminism, and postmodern feminism. (Andermahr, Lovell & Wolkowitz, 1997). Even though they all sound different, some can be put under the same category due to their similar nature and issues. On the other hand, these theories provide a differentiated interpretation of various cultural, political, social, and economic contexts. Black feminism focuses specifically on black women's struggles (Kanneh, 1998, p.45).

Collins (2000) views black feminism as an issue to resist injustice through liberation, including the crossroads of racism and sexism. According to black feminist thinking, when each individual, political and economic institutions put effort to alter their state of consciousness, and only then a social change can be possible (p.55). The black feminist analysis emphasizes what it means to be a black woman in racist, patriarchal systems. Differences in ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, and religion are distinct, visible, and palpable in many cultures (Johnson, 1983, p. 34).

Radical feminism strives for women's freedom. Radical feminists argue that men and women are biologically different, and women should take this dimension into account in the quest for fair rights and equality. Radical feminism sees female oppression as the most basic oppression, including culture, race, and economic class boundaries. It is a revolutionary type of feminism aiming to incur a social change at an unprecedented rate. Women who try to get to the roots of social issues become radical feminists. The masculine society has always regarded women as weak, emotional, sensitive, and eager to love and nurture, needing safety. Women continue to rely on men in not reciprocated ways for emotional security (Johnson, 1983, p.35).

Radical feminists argue that, unlike men, women are humane, versatile, non-competitive, and cooperative. They demand moral freedom and intellectual freedom from privacy changes and insults from degrading assumptions. Radical feminists criticize love for affecting the mind and body of women alike. The love between the heterosexual man and woman should be genuinely mutual. However, women give up

their autonomy to men who have little to do with love for social and economic reasons since men in economic and social spheres are more powerful than women. Women, therefore, remain emotionally dependent on men in a way that is not reciprocated. Radical feminists, for example, find that the oppression of women is rooted mainly in psychological factors (Donovan, 2012, p. 143).

Cultural feminists claim that women are divided and persuaded of their social inferiority (Jenainati & Groves, 2007, p. 97). To them, women's experiences are distinct from those of men, and therefore should be taken into account when reforming society based on women's particular abilities. Thus, they envision a society where women's capabilities and strengths are fully utilized. They celebrate women's knowledge and existence, nurturing women's culture. Cultural feminists' value feminine community over masculine individualism (Chrisler & McHugh, 2011, p. 40). Freudian psychoanalysis serves as a source of feminist analysis of sexual difference and the construction of gender in a patriarchal society. The Freudian theory says that all human beings are good during childhood, but they become inadequate because of society's influence. Every individual has a union of both masculine and feminine qualities. In the pre-genital period, boys and girls are equal. In puberty, the sharp differentiation of male and female characters occurs. The psychological forces developed in women hinder later sexual life. In this period, a woman could not exhibit her demands and desires because of social and moral problems. In an Oedipal relationship, a boy becomes a rival to the father; however, Sigmund Freud does not discuss what happens to the daughter during this period (Friedan, 2001, p. 65).

Liberal feminism concentrates on women's rights, including access to education, voting rights, economic freedom, and citizenship. Many women profit from liberal feminism policies that emphasize women's public life. Still, they have been criticized for that very purpose because they do not adequately resolve personal problems, including childcare and poverty (Saulnier, 1996, p. 42). Marxist feminism concentrates on women's liberation by contributing to labor development in family life (Andermahr, Lovell & Wolkowitz, 1997, p.37). MacKinnon (1997) says, "Sexuality is to feminism what work is to Marxism: that which is most one's own, yet most take away" (p. 65). To Marxists, work means creating one's social life and

value. It defines who a person is. The emphasis is on the material conditions and transformation of women's lives. Women must have a socialized and competent household as a primary concern, including great pay for childcare, cuisine, clean-up, and other domestic work, often restricted to feminine work (Donovan,2012, p. 66).

Socialist feminism, often referred to as Marxist feminism or materialistic feminism, is significant because it requests an end to capitalism by a socialist economic change. Socialist feminists consider gender disparities as the integrity of the capitalist system, which makes an enormous profit from unpaid homework by women and underpaid jobs throughout the workforce. Men in capitalist systems are more likely to share their power and wealth with other men, so women have less chance and less support as a result (Evans, 1995, p. 70).

Eco-feminist Françoise D'Eubonne coins the word eco-feminism used after several activities and demonstrations against environmental degradation (leading to ecological disasters) in the 1970s. In March 1980, the USA's first eco-feminist conference was held under the banner Women and Life on Earth: A Conference on Eco-feminism in the Eighties (Mies & Shiva, 1997, pp 497-498). Eco-feminists believe that natural and environmental degradation is politically equivalent to ongoing domination and abuse against women. They attempt to find ways to correlate women's oppression with environmental degradation and find solutions to both problems (Jenainati & Groves, 2007, pp. 104-105). Chrisler & McHugh (2011) add further to the eco-feminist argument:

> According to ecofeminists, the oppression of women is one aspect of the patriarchal domination of nature; a healthy and balanced ecosystem requires a balance of power between women and men and respect for the interdependent web of life. Ecofeminists have contributed to feminist psychology by articulating a critical perspective on patriarchal and positivist science as potentially harmful. (p. 42)

Equality feminism, as a subset of feminism, is about equal opportunities between the sexes of men and women. In her article titled as *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft (1792) puts forth the idea of women's enjoyment of legal and political rights just like men. Mill's argument in *The Subjection of Women* (2016) revolves around the idea that one's birth should not determine his/her position in society but his/her very being, just because he/she possesses human being

qualities. Even physical and biological differences should not matter when treating both genders as a male or a female.

Anarchist feminism argues that patriarchy is born of an involuntary power dynamic. Brown (1996) offers that anarchism is a political philosophy that opposes all relationships of power. It is inherently feminist (p. 208). The late nineteenth and early twentieth-century's anarchist feminists such as Voltairine De.Cleyre, Emma Goldman, and Loucy Parsons contribute to the emergence of anarchist feminism. According to them, women endure class struggles against both the patriarchal societies and the state itself, and the discussion of this endurance makes up the feminist work. Even though Emma Goldman opposes the first wave of feminism and its goals, she advocates for women's rights. For that reason, she is evaluated as the founding mother of anarchist feminism. Anarchist feminism seeks to resist patriarchy, state power, and class divisions as the primary factors for women's struggles. In 1897, Goldman urged to request a woman's autonomy, her right to sustain herself, live independently, and love whomever she pleases. Additionally, she fought for equality of sexes, freedom of action, freedom of love, and freedom in motherhood (Goldman, 1969, p. 224).

Postmodern feminism questions and brands the socialist feminist view as some form of reflection of a conventional male view, which tells only one side of the story about reality, experience, ethics, and politics; such a story is not viable to them as the women's perspective varies from the class, ethnic and cultural status (Audi, 1999, p. 306). However, it is not attractive because the one and the true philosophy are used by conventional philosophy to suppress many voices. Chrisler & McHugh (2011) offer the following:

> Postmodern feminism resists grand theories, avoids essentialism, and calls for a more complex understanding of gender. Postmodern feminism not only allows but encourages us to shift our thinking from one position and method to another. From the postmodern perspective, we may strategically employ social constructionism, empiricism. Also, other epistemological and methodological approaches, without becoming mired in orthodoxy or wedded to any position. Postmodern thinking advocates for feminisms (i.e., multiple feminist positions and perspective) rather than divisive arguments over which perspective is best or accurate. (p. 53)

The word post-feminism gained weight following the second wave of feminism. The post-feminist is a form of the feminist movement centered on the sex/gender disparity between men and women while being pioneered by Julia Kristeva, Hélène Cixous, and Luce Irigaray, who tackled Freudian and Lacanian theories (Raddeker, 2007, p. 113).

1.4. Simone de Beauvoir's Perspective of Feminism

Simone de Beauvoir was a radical French intellectual, writer, and activist. Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* deals with women's unappreciated and undermined status and inspires the women's movement. *The Second Sex*, the masterpiece that sets out to research the experience of being a woman in Western society, is considered to mark the birth of feminism. Beauvoir's resounding success illustrates the full scope of sexism and gender discrimination in modern society. Her broad vision and use of critical instruments from various disciplinary fields have been methodically established to bring her case into the fields of literature, culture, and scholarship. Beauvoir challenges the agreed, centuries-old views of stereotypical roles of women both at home and in marriage as dictated by societies. De Beauvoir's book deals with women's social status from the beginning of civilization to the present day. Her key points are from the earliest times when women had to play a secondary role to men, and the whole of the human experience is perceived as male and defined in languages that exclude women (Bauer, 2016, p. 18).

In a sense, Beauvoir says *The Second Sex* attempts to establish what a woman is and why a woman is a woman and describes why the social definition of woman is problematic. Beauvoir insists that one must look not at the good of society but the individual interest: "In our opinion, there is no public good other than one that assures the citizens' private good; we judge institutions from the concrete opportunities they give to individuals" (Zarrinjooee & Kalantarian, 2017, p. 24). *The Second Sex* is widely remembered for stimulating the contemporary uprising of women. British academic Fallaize (1998) notes that Beauvoir has had such a significant impact that there are countless numbers of feminists who feel incredibly appreciative of her work (p. 15). Moi (1994) describes Beauvoir as an intellectual woman, a leader of education for the past because she has the unique chance to establish herself entirely as an academic in the country. It would not be wrong to say that Beauvoir would also outsmart by far any other intellectual woman of her time.

In *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir uses three points of reference to make her case. First, in historical materialism, de Beauvoir clarifies the role of social and economic factors and class in determining history, especially for women. Women are

economically and socially enslaved by men and entirely reliant on them for all their needs. She emphasizes how society handles women as legal minors, which frustrates their desire to engage on an equal basis with men in public life. That is why women are mostly absent from the significant historical phases, as men were often given greater economic, political, and social control and had a more significant impact on cultural and historical events. Beauvoir also employs existentialism as a philosophy emphasizing personal freedom and choice. Then she explores the root causes—so-called subconscious—of human actions by psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis is used for exposing the second sex contradictions and falsehoods in theories of femininity. It has been realized all over art, literature, religion, and popular culture. (Moi, 1994, pp.33-34)

Beauvoir's writings are controversial as she compares female passivity and immanence with male transcendence. Beauvoir concludes that the female body is uniformly disgusted, and motherhood is devalued (Moi, 1994, p.33). By her detailed existentialist study, Beauvoir indicates that women are more enigmatic than men and, therefore, more extensively challenged to live the vague aspects of human life. Beauvoir describes a route from oppression to potential independence as an independent woman to gain economic and social independence through compensated professional positions and mutuality with men. Politically, Beauvoir (1956) pursues equality as a socialist rather than a feminist. She thinks that women's fight for class positions could help boost women's status more effectively than individual advocacy of women's rights (p. 689).

Perhaps the most popular argument of *The Second Sex* is that womanhood is acquired later in life rather than by birth, which represents the distinction between sex and gender, same as the biological difference between man and woman (p. 273). Thus, Beauvoir underlines those women are not born females, but she thinks what creates women and molds them into a patriarchal society as an oppressed and second state are the social and cultural norms. Beauvoir attributes the creation of women to destiny rather than biology and states that what creates this creature is the society, not any other forms of biological, physiological, psychological, or economic forces. Society and social forces oppress her and decide how and what a woman must be like. She furthers her ideas by saying that men oppress women at home and do so

through social institutions as well. To her, everything else just helps confirm this oppression through the [hierarchy of the sexes] (Beauvoir, 1956, p. 292).

The Second Sex claims that nobody is born as a woman but becomes one when she is raised. Beauvoir's early influence is political to much extent. Awareness establishing movements enable women to examine their social beliefs for themselves. Gender suggests a process in which the person is to discuss different cultural interpretations of bodies to comprehend where it stands within several cultural possibilities. Normative families and other social structures require the distribution of power to be in the patriarchal system. Beauvoir considers that the traditionally male-dominated family is among the components of any given culture that reproduces the idea of men's supremacy and dominance. Beauvoir recognizes the physiological or biological differences between men and women. Moi (1994) suggests that becoming a woman is best seen as a backdrop to all her decisions and that Beauvoir finds a means to address the sexual distinction. Beauvoir frequently stresses that women are classified as the second sex and the other (p.24).

Thus, women are subordinated in societies in which biological characteristics are believed to be the prominent deciding element for their inferior and secondary status, which is stated below by Grimwood (2008) as:

> Woman has ovaries, a uterus. These peculiarities imprison her in her subjectivity, circumscribe her within the limits of her nature. It is often said that he thinks with her glands, such as testicles, and that they secrete hormones. He thinks of his body as a direct and normal connection with the world, which he believes he apprehends objectively. In contrast, he regards the body of a woman as a hindrance, a prison, weighed down by everything peculiar to it. (p. 45)

Gender must be seen to adopt or realize possibilities, perceive the body, and give it cultural shape. In other words, to be a woman is to become a woman; it is not a question of obtaining a fixed ontological position in which one may be born a woman, but instead, an active process to capture cultural possibilities, interpret and reinterpret them. The verb *become* includes a resulting complexity for Beauvoir. Gender is not just a cultural structure. While it is identity imposed, in some sense, gender is a mechanism that constructs itself. Women are a purposeful and suitable collection of conduct, the acquisition of an ability, a project, the use of Sartrian words, and a specific bodily style and significance. If *become* corresponds to *assume*

or represent intentionally, then it appears that Beauvoir has an appeal for a voluntary gender account. If gender is somewhat selected, what do we do with gender as a cultural structure? In more contemporary times, it is customary to conceive of gender as a passively defined, personified structure of patriarchy or phallogocentric language that precedes and decides the subject (Vintges, 1999, p. 76).

For Beauvoir, the self-other is essential; the self (the superior) is the man, and the other is the woman. Beauvoir notes that the woman is often identified as something inessential by the relationship between man and woman while man is essential. She is inessential because she has been historically considered dependent on the man and not on herself. Beauvoir writes, "she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject; he is the Absolute – she is the Other" (1956, p. 16). Humanity is often identified as male; we always identify humankind as man, and all general statements regarding the subject, the person, and the entity are represented as men.

In Western cultural systems, even philosophers have had a negative assessment of women. Aristotle says a woman is female because of specific characteristics and lack of qualities and Thomas Aquinas's woman is an imperfect man. According to Beauvoir (1956), the traditional woman is a sexual being: "For him, she is sex – absolute sex, no less" (p. 4). Beauvoir thinks there is a dialectic between man and woman in which the man is described as self and the woman as the other. The other is inferior, identified as the unusual, the incomprehensible, and the alien. The woman is now in this other role, and the individual is the self and the superior. Beauvoir refers to the German philosopher Hegel, to whom the self often opposes and describes itself to the other; this means that the self can only express itself against what it is not, up against something that it does not: the other (Gines, 2014).

The self is still hostile to the other man: "We find ourselves in consciousness a fundamental animosity towards any other consciousness; the subject can only be opposed—it is the important, the non-essential, the object" (Otoom, 2016, p .33). This dialectic is known as Hegel's master-slave dialectics; the self is the master that slaves the other. This master-slave dialectic Beauvoir now extends to man-to-woman

relationships. The man here should be the master, and the slave is the woman. According to Beauvoir, the woman becomes something less than the man. However, Beauvoir questions if she is reduced to this lower position, why does she not rebel?

> Why is it that women do not dispute male sovereignty? No subject will readily volunteer to become the object, the inessential; it is not the Other who, in defining himself as the Other, establishes the One. The other is posed as such by the One in defining himself as the One. But if the Other is not to regain the status of being the One, he must be submissive enough to accept this alien point of view. Whence comes to this submission in the case of a woman? (1956, p. 17)

Other repressed classes such as the blacks of colonial history or the proles of class-battle history form a class identity and find themselves repressed in this, sharing a shared condition toward their oppressor. Beauvoir (1956) says that part of the reason women do not identify as a group in opposition to the male oppressor is that a woman does not see herself as someone standing in the way of an oppressor. Women do not form a single community toward their husbands; on the contrary, they live dependent on other men, namely their husbands or fathers, in terms of shelter, housework, economic condition, or social standing (p. 7). The woman shares a so-called "primordial Mitsein" with her spouse, a social situation. Thus, women do not organize as workers or slaves do and therefore do not recognize themselves as the oppressed party:

> Male and female stand opposed within a primordial Mitsein, and woman has not broken it. The couple is a fundamental unity with its two halves riveted together, and the cleavage of society along the line of sex is impossible. Here is to be found the basic trait of woman: she is the Other in a totality of which the two components are necessary to one another. (Beauvoir, 1956, p.19)

In such dialectics, the woman as the lower one entirely depends on the individual, the superior, or the master even though he needs the slave in Hegel's dialectics. Man does not recognize the slave. As a wife, she enjoys the same privileges in the family as the man. Alternatively, she is an object for courtship, and she may have the upper hand when she is young. However, a woman's equality as a mother, mistress, or wife is not absolute, and Beauvoir refers to abstract equality as opposed to the present inequality. Abstract equality is related to home or family, where a woman respects motherhood and wife status. Simultaneously, the existing disparity is related to society at large, where sexual harassment still exists. It can be

argued that this kind of repression is very advantageous for women and happier staying at home to care for themselves. However, if women are doomed to stagnate lives, they are also deprived of their human rights. Beauvoir (1956) argues the following matter of freedom:

> There is no justification for present existence other than its expansion into indefinitely open future. Every time transcendence falls back into immanence, stagnation; there is a degradation of existence into the 'ensoi,' the wildlife of subjection to given conditions, and of liberty into constraint and contingence. This downfall represents a moral fault if the subject consents to it; if it is inflicted upon him, it spells frustration and oppression. In both cases, it is an absolute evil. Every individual concerned to justify his existence tells that his existence involves an undefined need to transcend himself, to engage in freely chosen projects. (p. 27)

Beauvoir paraphrases Sartre's existentialism in the above excerpt. The human being is fundamentally free; his life is defined by being able to choose. Beauvoir refers to this as his transcendence. Whether she accepts this freedom or prefers that freedom, it returns to immanence. For instance, whether a woman accepts repression or not, she resides in immanence or stagnation. She is continually obligated to adopt the other's position, sentenced to a life of immanence, stagnation, and everlasting transcendence of another ego: the man. (Moi,1994)

According to Simone de Beauvoir, a woman struggles with a variety of household tasks throughout her life: she cooks, sweeps, washes clothing, raises her children, and spends her entire life feeding her husband and children. As a result, she has complete control over her home and her surroundings. The marriage, on the other hand, becomes a valueless affair. She is treated ungratefully for the services she has provided.

> . . . marriage is today a surviving relic of dead ways of life, and situation of the wife is more ungrateful than formerly, because she still has the same duties but they no longer confer the same rights, privileges and honours. Man marries today to obtain an anchorage in immanence, but not to be himself confined theirin; he wants to have hearth and home while being free to escape therefrom . .(Beauvoir ,1956,p.442).

As a result, a woman's work at home affords her little autonomy. It is also not directly beneficial to society. In *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir famously argues that domestic employment is a form of exploitation and oppression. She claims that the

obligation to undertake or supervise household tasks leads women to constant activity that produces nothing. Domestic work for her simply perpetuates and imprisons the status quo of women's immanence. On the other hand, men are free to move and progress in being. In other words, they are transcendent since they can share their human subjectivity and live it out. Developing on and criticizing Beauvoir's work, Irigaray argues that a woman puts the home at the man's disposal without having disposed of himself because her job is to handle it but not determine what happens to it. Thus, while the man builds the family house and the woman runs it, the man's actual duty is to re-preserve and retains his identity (as cited in Bainbridge, 2008).

Motherhood has been one of the focal reasons for denying women's rights and equality and discriminating against them. Beauvoir (1956) argues that. "It is fraudulent to maintain that through maternity woman becomes the actual equal of man"(p.503); Beauvoir believes that motherhood was the primary factor that made women "others" and linked them to immanence. She believes that women are conditioned to view motherhood as the essence of their existence and fulfill their destiny.

Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* explores equality's theoretical and societal nature in the feminist sense within a historical context. During the conflict between equality and difference, feminism made an appearance in the 1970s when the former was widely predominant. The egalitarian sense of the movement rose coincidentally with women arguing and advocating for pay equity, equal occupations, elected officials, and academic pursuits. The difference in feminist ideologies led to the argument that women would need to carve a new path for femininity—apart from existing male-dominated norms—to establish a genuinely egalitarian environment. In this regard, services and institutions meant only women who gained prominence; this also transpired due to the influences of maternal and French feminist movements.

Feminism subsequently consisted of many other types of feminism that worked together at times and against each other at other times. Although egalitarian advocates offered their perspectives, different feminism subscribers were scarcely convinced. This substantial and behavioral revolution seemed somewhat unstable, as

authorities in societies rarely faced change (Eisenstein, 1981). For this reason, a certain amount of biological difference was to be acknowledged, which regularly affected other parameters such as ethnicity or gender. Apart from that, women already faced the disadvantage of not being favored by the already present authorities. Often, a difference of genders existed that was used to support or justify the inequality.

The concept of equality feminism, from a different feminist viewpoint, is that universalism often takes on a set of specific values which, in turn, create unknown hierarchies in which wealthy people and women, usually heteronormative, middle class, first world, and colonial character. Feminists have made significant attempts to make these exclusions a part of the universal language. In contrast, feminists of equality react by becoming abundantly clear that immutable truths could integrate the difference under the right communicative and procedural circumstances. On the other hand, the issue of equality feminism with differential feminism would be that sexual disparity could also strengthen women's household responsibilities and define their natural differences from men. However, differential feminism uses this sexual disparity as a strategy to make it clear that this is a familiar subordination tactic and does not discourage the appeal to accept difference from being used (Armstrong, 2002).

Resistance needs to reach past, eliminating gender disparities and gaining equal treatment between women and men. The differential feminism regards these methods as an add women and stir approach and overwhelmingly dismisses them (Armstrong, 2002). An agonistic relationship on different occasions between equality and differential feminism is the key outcome of this impasse. First, there is still a disagreement between difference and equality feminists regarding which approach is more productive (Armstrong, 2002). Secondly, some feminists put forth the idea of amalgamation of the two types of feminists. Then, it is possible to shed further light on the conditions that produce each strategy's limits beyond rights and sexual difference—by understanding masculine subjectivity and the need for an imaginative realm for envisaging women's equality using Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (Baum, 2004).

Feminist thinkers such as Beauvoir and Friedan (1963) equip women with the tools needed to express their social, economic, political, and sexual inferiority to men. These thinkers are the backbones of the second wave of feminism, and they fight to achieve equality with men in the Western world. Those that are mainly middle-class, heterosexual and white women are the ones that take on active roles in actions and organizations reported by mainstream media within the public sphere. They think women are created as equal as men, so they deserve to be equal in various areas like the workplace, electoral institutions, and the family. Simultaneously, inside the feminist movement and academic feminism, differing opinions have emerged at odds with fair feminism's early policies. One of those dissenting voices belongs to socialist feminists. To them, egalitarian policies seem to advocate the middle-class women but fail to address both the needs of working-class and disadvantaged women. Socialist feminists, on the other hand, use capitalism to criticize the patriarchal system. Unlike socialist feminists, equality feminists do not even dare to test out capitalism as a form of oppression, dismiss the idea that women are equal in a capitalistic world, and do not attempt to alter capitalism's framework (as cited in Hartmann, 1981).

Black women claim that racism and unemployment, which overwhelmingly impact visible minority women, are not just overlooked but often reinforced by the equality strategy implemented predominantly by white females. Feminists, in critical race theory, see egalitarian policies embedded in the colonialism they believe. It is difficult for visible minority women to gain equality as long as Western liberalism and imperial dominance exist inadequately unquestioned and intact (Mohanty, 2003, p. 88). Within such a heteronormative motion, lesbian feminists perceive marginalization and animosity. In its conceptualization of equal rights, Homosexual feminism argues that equality feminism should challenge its heterosexual assumptions (Wittig, 1980). All kinds of mentioned feminisms claim that following a policy of equality implies the subordination of the needs and desires of working-class women, women of color, and lesbians to those of middle-class, Eurocentric, and heterosexual women. According to French feminists, sexual differences are seen as the gateway to understand why women experience subordination. (Gilligan, 1993).

The distinction between women and men is fundamentally phallogocentric to French feminism, implying that the very nature of thought—i.e., rationality—is misogynist. Since they fundamentally oppress the feminine, feminine speech cannot properly place within the dominant patriarchal framework and language. Maternal feminism, on the other hand, takes women's desires and experiences into consideration (Chodorow, 1994, pp50-59). In the past, Beauvoir highlights the idea of how women have been downgraded to the state of executing motherhood and repetition of chores. Women always try to define themselves and their liberty by developing and executing their projects rationally like men. Men treat women of lesser importance and exert dominance over them; however, this may not mean women are unwilling to accept their dominance. Indeed, Beauvoir argues that they wish liberty, the kind of liberty that the male body and masculine mind express for her.

The Ethics of Ambiguity by Beauvoir (1948) attempts to illustrate this definition of freedom to the project idea. In *The Ethics of Ambiguity,* a person becomes free by realizing that he/she is not free in the first place. The ability to overcome one's present condition by achieving one's most significant power via a generous act includes establishing and creating an impact in his/her setting, such as making history. If one conducts in a determined and imaginative manner, one takes on measures that transcend one's present life. Through extending the will and awareness of oneself constructing and altering the landscape in one's external world, one exceeds oneself. In *the Ethics of Ambiguity*, the kind of effort that would define this operation remains theoretical. Furthermore, in *The Second Sex*, it becomes more concrete in the form of art, literature, and craftsmanship (Beauvoir, 1948).

In Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, two places of liberation separately spotlight equality and feminism of distinction. The first is a masculine person who has driven Western civilization's growth, a theme that empowers feminism for equality. The second one happens in the future, and mindful of discrepancies that need to be reconciled into a gender equality partnership. This topic can distinguish the difference and the influence they create and how power overwhelmingly refuses to consider and recognize the disparities that might extend women's rights in the current context (Beauvoir, 1956).

There are two types of freedom created by each place of liberty conflicting with one another. The first sense of freedom reflects the definition of freedom by Jean-Paul Sartre. The Cartesian cogito is repeated and positions it in the future and real will of the subject independently of its circumstance. The cogito decides the independence of the individual. This theme implies that the cogito decides the autonomy, even if the body gets to be restricted by an outer force, whether it is a statute, rule, another body, tradition, or custom. Sartre's subject is still able to advance the idea of freedom in and through her mind. Beauvoir targets feminists and argues that she implements Sartre's model for women with no criticism at all. The feminist critics of Beauvoir think that the consequence of this implementation would not mean women have similar impulses and equal rights as men. Feminists, on the other hand, show their support for Beauvoir's use of Sartre's model and think women would be more resistant against the current oppressing circumstances, and as a result, be distinguished from being merely a constituted entity (Moi,1994).

Advocates for such interpretation of Beauvoir agree on the notion that the female figure is aware that she is created through repressive patriarchal formations. What these progressives fail to mention, though, is that the change implied by this being is more radical in the current than a full fulfillment of liberty. Indeed, such an accomplished transition cannot be executed in *The Second Sex* from the beginning. The requirements of patriarchy present themselves as boundaries; this is why women and men's position of completed independence occur within *The Second Sex* in the long term. This happens when present problems and issues are settled; the differences are recognized fraternally, usually from apprehension to liberation for both genders. Gender equality is for those who want to have equality.

In *The Second Sex*, the disparities by men are distinguishable and their coexistence takes place outside of history. The first male subjectivity position stresses equality that Beauvoir wishes for women than men already inherently possess. Just as men on the planet are aware of their independence and ability to behave, so are women (Beauvoir, 1956). In Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, like women's subjectivity, women are indeed subjugated by men as a consciousness lacking entirely their own. As early as the book's introductory pages, Beauvoir refers to men without reasonable justification, establishing women's consciousness as

inferior and subordinate. Beauvoir aims to create a fair culture that regards women as universal beings, unlike men or genderless entities. She considers the male gender as the standard and norm for such a patriarchal society.

In comparison, women are merely objects of sex for men. In such a culture, women are characterized as opposed to their distinctions from men. The male body is considered regular, and the female body is abnormal and characterized by its ability to reproduce. Beauvoir criticizes patriarchy's sexual stereotypes placed upon women and claims that the female body justifies women's role. *The Second Sex* claims that both men and women must adjust their animosity. Whether reciprocal or not, both parties are confident to realize their contingent physical life as intellectual and educated humans. Men should give up their urge to embrace their contingencies so that they no longer require a mirror in the form of a feminine object. Women, in return, must no longer prefer the protection of a supposed object's position. In other words, men and women should avoid using other sexes to conceal their role as contingent individuals (Vintges, 1996, p. 145).

SECOND CHAPTER

2.FEMALE PROBLEMS IN *THE AWAKENING*

Kate Chopin's novel *The Awakening* was published in 1899, and it discusses women's role in the late 19th century. It depicts Edna Pontellier, a young woman who questions her role in the patriarchal society and feels bounded by motherhood and marriage constraints. The protagonist of the novel is Edna Pontellier, a feminist character who is twenty-eight-year-old. She has a miserable marriage life and the limited conservative lifestyle dictated by the Creole society. She suffers from both social class abuses and the mother-woman role imposed by the patriarchal system. Léonce Pontellier, her husband, exploits Edna both in the social realm of his business and home, which is represented by children and housework. Edna is expected to abide by the motherly role she is expected to follow, but she just does not act that way.

Edna wishes to be an independent woman, which is uncommon during the nineteenth century. Through Edna's representation, Chopin indicates that women desire more than being the angel of the house, taking care of their home and the children. She challenges the patriarchal culture and gender inequality. Edna's state shifts drastically from being a dedicated woman and mother to a kind of different awareness. She becomes aware of her identity and satisfies both her emotions and sexual desires. Having had many experiences, she gains her independence and lives alone without her kids and husband, and goes after her desires and urges (Ariparno, 2016, p. 4).

2.1. **Gender and Oppression in *The Awakening***

In *The Awakening*, the protagonist Edna cannot fit herself in the gender role attributed by Victorian culture. The gender constructions of society are legitimized by

the natural law that declares biology to be a woman's destiny to create a hierarchical system. Victorian society materializes gender building in a particular time and place. As mentioned in Chapter One, according to Beauvoir (1956), women are treated as lesser and therefore considered as the other within a man-dominant culture. Thus, they become less subjective and creative. Eventually, their existence gets to be somewhere in between immanence and transcendence. Women are not characterized in terms of individuality but in the realm of their relation to men. Chodorow (1994) purports that "women in most societies are defined relationally as someone's wife, mother, daughter, daughter-in-law; even a nun becomes the Bride of Christ" (p. 58).

Beauvoir (1956), in *The Second Sex,* claims that "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (p. 301). Recurrent male practices, for example, limit Edna's freedom in ways that she feels limited and constrained to cause change. Many reviews of the critics seem fitting to a new reading of Chopin's novel. Spivak's criticism comes from the idea that women lack a voice, representing patriarchal violence she thinks. Spivak indicates that the novel cannot recover or hear the subaltern or the marginalized speech. Spivak is accused of deliberate surrounding the native voice that he could hear since she attributes the hegemonic discourse to absolute power (as cited in Parry, 1987, p. 211).

Edna is presented to readers from the beginning of the novel as Mrs. Pontellier, not as Edna. Thus, the narrator shows that the male institution rejects female sexual personality by denying Edna's name. As the story continues, Edna gradually rebuilds and reconstructs her individuality. Later on, the narrator starts to address Edna by her name; this indicates that Edna becomes more aware of her inner self as Robert describes the apparent reasons for his exile to another country and his

uninterrupted search for his feelings. He tells Edna that "because you have not been free; you are the wife of Leonce Pontellier" to deprive her of her individuality and describe her only as another man's wife, Edna says, "I am no longer one of Mr, Pontellier's possessions to dispose of or not. I give myself where I choose" (Chopin,1899, p. 113). Edna became conscious that she must liberate herself to establish a male model of selfhood from which normative cultural standards for women sharply diverge (Schweitzer, 1990, p. 168).

Practices in such a patriarchal system are not expected from women at Edna's time to be independent, but they must rely on the power of patriarchal systems. Chopin has shown Edna is unlikely to break the rule. She has little chance to break the standard and behave against male-dominated ideologies, so it is difficult for Edna, even impossible, to awaken her self-knowledge. The male-dominated culture leaves no room for Edna to talk as a liberated woman as Beauvoir believes that very few women are liberated (as cited in Card, 2003, p. 194). Edna's effort to cut her ties with her husband to get married and consequently with the patriarchal society by attempting to break her wedding ring is futile at first. Her initiative does not impact the ring, which remains unbreakable: "taking off her wedding ring, fling it upon the carpet…she stamps her heel upon it, striving to crush it. However, her small boot heel does not make an indenture, not a mark upon the little glittering circlet" (Chopin, 1899, p. 59). The quote from the novel reveals Edna's dissatisfaction with her marriage. She demonstrates this emotion by tossing her wedding ring and crushing it.

However, the ring remains unbreakable. It implies that Edna cannot be liberated from the marriage. The main character, Edna, is seen as despaired and unhappy in her marriage, and her husband is with someone to whom he marries without love. The silent communication indicates that she recognizes her position within the social system of marriage, and also when she later attempts to discard the ring, "[holds] out her hand, and taking the ring, slip[s] it upon her finger" (Chopin,1899, p. 51). Edna imitates male behaviour and speech, and this is how her gender gets to be built up.

According to Butler (2007), gender is thought to be considered together with politics and culture, intersecting with racial, classical, ethnic, sexual, and regional forms of speech-built identities (p. 4). In the novel, the sea is a very significant feature. As described in the novel, the sea is a striking illustration of male expression, suggesting that Edna cannot interact and find her place within the society's male dialogue. The novel's re-reading portrays other meanings than liberation and escape to the sea. The sea's portrayal is closely related to why Edna uses masculine vocabulary and male speech for her iniquities and violations. For example, Edna tells her husband, "I thought I should have perished out there [sea] alone" (Chopin, 1899, p. 38). Thinking of the sea, Edna "recall[s] the terror" (p. 156), and she feels the "old terror" (p. 157). The sea is still connected to terror and horror because Edna fears going up against the waves and conquering the sea (of male discourses). At the beginning of the novel, when she is at open sea, her soul gets afflicted by the sudden vision of death and gets horrified at the same time, and then feels weakened (Chopin,1899, pp. 37-38). The writer repeats the voice of the sea many times in the novel. One instance is when the voice of the sea is seductive; never ceasing, whispering, clamouring, murmuring, inviting the soul to wander for a spell in abysses of solitude; to lose itself in mazes of inward contemplation (Chopin, 1899, p. 18).

As the novel opens, women are seen to be in constant interaction with a variety of intricacies of cultural and social dialogues that they cannot escape from (Chopin, 1899, p.8). The idea that Edna puts effort into learning how to swim is quite significant because that shows her will to deal with the sea. However, she fails to succeed because she drowns in the final scene. It is a way of confronting the intimidating sea, but Edna fails. Like a snake, the sea is a phallic sign. The seductive male sea engages in sexual intercourse and consumes Edna. This shows how society exerts pressure on those who do not use masculine language and therefore are intolerant to resistance. The power of Edna has gone into the sea, and fear fills the whole of her being. She is silenced at sea, and she cannot tell her story (Hildebrand, 2016).

Edna hears "the hum of bees" and "the smells musky odor of pinks" (Chopin,1899, p. 157). Interestingly, Edna's final effort only leads to self-

effacement, and her self-representation is erased in the sea, where the privilege of manhood over femininity is visible. The writer associates the sea with the sun, femininity with darkness. The sun and the sea, for example, are mentioned as follows: “the sun is low in the west, and the soft and languorous breeze came up from the south, charged with the seductive odor of the sea” (Chopin,1899, p. 16). Chopin brings a bird to indicate trapping when the sea is mentioned. The motif of caged birds demonstrates that patriarchal discourses have not given Edna strong wings—not strong ones—to move beyond the convention.

At the end of the novel, there is “a bird with a broken wing that was beating the air above, reeling, fluttering, circling disabled down, down to the water” (Chopin, 1899, p. 156). Chopin’s (1899) words at the beginning of the novel are worth noting: “A green and yellow parrot, hung in a cage outside the door, keeps repeating over and over: “Allez Vous-en! Allez Vous-en! Sapristi! He can speak a little Spanish, and also a language which nobody understands” (p. 1). Identifying the bird indicates that the female language is insufficient, and it is challenging to communicate in a patriarchal-dominated society.

Beauvoir (1956) states that “humanity is male, and man defines woman, not in herself but as relative to him”. Beauvoir (1956) thinks that a woman is not independent but rather an incidental and inessential being. He is the Subject; he is the Absolute; she is the Other (p. 16). Similarly, Butler (2007) claims that women are classified as the other and therefore disadvantaged against men. She also thinks that there should not be normative social system where women’s value judgment is not taken into consideration (p.13). Chopin also agrees with these ideas in *The Awakening* and presents Edna as someone not welcomed by society. Through the depiction of Edna’s death, Chopin reveals that women are not free to change their socially constructed situation, and they have to stand before men’s rule.

The Awakening concentrates on the differences between the social class and the problems of gender inequality, which leads to conflict and oppression within a woman’s life. Tong (2009) states that women’s oppression for being a woman is hard to interpret (p. 49). She believes that women have been the first-ever to be marginalized historically. Women’s oppression has been commonly used and existed

in every culture. Women's oppression is the most challenging thing to eradicate, and even improvements in a society would not abolish them. Women suffer from horrendous victim misery because of pressure and oppression, sets the foundation for other models of oppression.

Beauvoir, in *The Second Sex*, argues domestic labor stands as a form of slavery and oppression. She argues that women are continually engaged in practices that do not produce much because they are obliged to supervise household duties. Domestic work perpetuates and imprisons the status quo of women. At the same time, men are free to move, to progress, to become. In other words, they have transcendence by expressing and witnessing their human subjectivity. Building on Beauvoir's work while also opposing it, Irigaray (1993) argues a woman hands over her home to the man without actually disposing of it, as her function is to manage it, not to decide what happens to it. Men want women to be at home without any encouragement or motivation to live their lives entirely. While the man establishes and runs the house for his family, the woman's main job is to reflect the man's identity, retaining and reinforcing. The development of his subjectivity at the expense of woman is evident in *The Awakening*, where Mr. Pontellier is the best husband in the world (p. 887). It is incomprehensible why Edna does not want to act just like any woman, particularly her friend Madame Adèle Ratignolle.

Two factors cause Edna's social oppression. The first factor is her husband, and the second is the upper-class Creole society. The first one, though, is more detrimental to Edna's suppression than the latter. Léonce is a busy businessman who lives in the upper class with a money-driven personality in constant interaction with his customers. He is too carried away with running his own business without giving any priority to his wife's needs. Léonce exemplifies the upper class's treatment of the time by buying gifts and spending money in exchange for happiness, kindness, and care that his wife might need. He tries to build a good relationship with his customers because financial matters come first for upper-class people. It is seen in the following description.

> Coming back to dinner?" his wife called after him. He halted a moment and shrugged his shoulders. He felt in his vest pocket; there was a ten-dollar bill there. He did not know; perhaps he would return for the early dinner,

> and maybe he would not. It all depended upon the company he found over at Klein's and the size of "the game." He did not say this, but she understood it and laughed, nodding good-by to him. (Chopin, 1899, p.7)

This quotation indicates that Edna's husband goes for business to Klien's hotel. He leaves his little family to dine alone while he decides to have dinner at the hotel with his customer because the money comes first. Edna's implicit goal in expressing her desire to ask her husband to return to dinner confirms that he will not come for dinner. Edna understands her husband's mentality grudgingly. This excerpt illustrates that Léonce, usually does not have dinner with his family as he gives his family a little attention while focusing on earnings more. As a man from the upper class, Léonce cares and offers his wife money to satisfy her.

> A few days later, a box arrived for Mrs. Pontellier from New Orleans. It was from her husband. It was filled with friandises, with luscious and toothsome bits--the finest of fruits, pates, a rare bottle or two, delicious syrups, and bonbons in abundance. Mrs. Pontellier was always very generous with the contents of such a box; she was quite used to receiving them when away from home. The pates and fruit were brought to the dining-room; the bonbons were passed around. And the ladies, selecting with dainty and discriminating fingers and a little greedily, all declared that Mr. Pontellier was the best husband in the world. Mrs. Pontellier was forced to admit that she knew of none better. (Chopin, 1899, pp.11-12).

When Léonce goes on a business trip, he keeps sending Edna gifts. He likes to make up for his absence from his wife by offering a present so that it will act as a replacement for his love, affection, and time. The moment Léonce sends an enormous box of expensive sweets to his family, women announce that he is the best husband. The society that she lives in expects her to have high regard for her husband, but Edna is far from seeing him as a successful husband. Edna is experiencing another oppression while waiting for her husband to bring her home. Edna waits outside her home when Léonce arrives, but contrary to what she expects, he offers her a glass of wine instead of love. Since her husband represents the upper class, he also expects the same from his wife by taking the glass of wine when offered, but she rejects it:

> Mr. Pontellier had prepared for bed, but he slipped on an extra garment. He opened a bottle of wine, of which he kept a small and select supply in a buffet of his own. He drank a glass of the wine, went out on the gallery, and offered a glass to his wife. She did not wish any. He drew up the rocker, hoisted his slippered feet on the rail, and proceeded to smoke a cigar. He smoked two cigars; then he went inside and drank another glass

> of wine. Mrs. Pontellier again declined to accept a glass when it was offered to her. Mr. Pontellier once more seated himself with elevated feet, and after a reasonable interval of time, smoked some more cigars. (Chopin, 1899, p. 36)

Due to her growing oppression, she leaves her husband and moves into a small building. She feels secure in that small house. Léonce's colossal house is not comfortable and warm enough for Edna. She does not even wait for her husband's opinion and decides to move out of her home on Esplanade Street to a little house around the block (Chopin, 1899, p. 89). When her husband discovers that his wife and children leave the house, he writes Edna a letter to rethink her decision.

> When Mr. Pontellier learned of his wife's intention to abandon her home and take up her residence elsewhere, he immediately wrote her a letter of unqualified disapproval and remonstrance. She had given reasons which he was unwilling to acknowledge as adequate. He hoped she had not acted upon her rash impulse, and he begged her to consider first, foremost, and above all else, what people would say. He was not dreaming of scandal when he uttered this warning; that was a thing which would never have entered into his mind to consider in connection with his wife's name or his own. He was simply thinking of his financial integrity. It might get noised about that the Pontellier's had met with reverses and were forced to conduct their menage on a humbler scale than heretofore. It might do incalculable mischief to his business prospects. (Chopin, 1899, p.98)

In *The Awakening*, Léonce Pontellier is portrayed as a business-oriented individual. Even when his wife leaves, he asks her to avoid what others would say. He asks Edna to reconsider her decision because if she does not come back home, she will ruin his name. For Léonce, a good reputation in the business and other financial engagements are way more important than anything else. Another way that Edna is oppressed is due to her disparity of cultural values with the upper-class Creole society. Edna learns two distinct cultures and develops a socially accepted ideal for herself. As time passes, Léonce asks Edna to play an active role in his social life that represents the upper-class Creole society. Although Edna seeks to involve herself, she is discriminated against by the upper-class Creole society:

> Mrs. Pontellier, though she had married a Creole, was not thoroughly at home in the society of Creoles; never before had she been thrown so intimately among them. There were only Creoles that summer at Lebrun's. They all knew each other, and felt like one large family, among whom existed the most amicable relations. A characteristic which distinguished them, and which impressed Mrs. Pontellier most forcibly was their entire absence of prudery. Their freedom of expression was at first incomprehensible to her, though she had no difficulty in reconciling it with

> a lofty chastity which in the Creole woman seems to be inborn and unmistakable. (Chopin, 1899, p.14)

His husband's society does not respect Edna because she marries a man from the upper class. She is never viewed and accepted as she should be because she comes from the middle class. Those with the highest status think that she is no use to them, and therefore they ignore her. Instead, the middle class of the Creole community suits her. They regard Edna as a family and accept her into their community nicely and warmly. They expose Edna's real self without being marginalized. White skin is an essential part of class representation and gender privilege in Chopin's text. The novel reveals Edna's social status through descriptions of sun-burnt and damaged skin. The first chapter of the novel portrays a scene where Edna comes back from the beach, her skin burned. Burnt and tanned skin has two meanings in Chopin's novel: (1) it establishes Edna's class, and (2) reveals her white and upper-middle-class woman identity.

Chopin introduces Edna to the pure and unaltered light experienced through the eyes of Léonce. The surreal relaxed scene points to the notions of male perceptions, whiteness, and class distinctions. After seeing the sun's influence on her, Léonce responds to her damaged skin. Chopin distinguishes between Léonce's attitude towards his wife when she had white skin and her skin was damaged. At the beginning of the novel, Edna's femininity is best illustrated in her interaction with her husband. Seeing Edna return from the sea, "Mr. Pontellier says, 'you are burnt beyond recognition.' While he is looking at his wife as a valuable piece of personal property, which has suffered some damage" (Chopin, 1899, p. 7). Personal property implies that her husband treats Edna as a commodity, not as a single person or an individual. Edna could actually restore her skin colour and change her appearance, but Léonce rejects her wish to do so and thus claims his dominance over her.

To Léonce, Edna is like a damaged property, and he thinks she ruins the very social status that she establishes through her clean and white skin. Tanning allows Edna to alter her white skin and working-class look and help her take on the appearance of a labourer. Edna is not changing her race or changing her status, but her burnt skin makes her look like a lower, working-class member, which is not appropriate. Chopin's juxtaposition in the text shows the clear distinction between

the working-class women in the text and those that embody leisure. Chopin's novel reveals the privileges of high-class society and demonstrates a prevalent practice: portraying anonymous black characters. All colour-skinned characters in the text are unidentified or referred to according to the percentage of their black heritage (quadroons or mulattos). They work or service consistently in the novel.

The black women are never named but strategically situated in Edna's society to demonstrate class and race hierarchy. Black characters are put in scenes that contrast their work with the white, leisurely women who share the scene. These photos enhance the notion that white women have certain rights, such as recreation, and consider it a social symbol for Edna since Chopin never mentions their names because they are unnecessary (Yeremia, 2018).

In the novel, the male gaze targets Edna as a woman, and the debate on this phenomenon determines the oppression of the female sex. In addition to Léonce, other male characters also contribute to establishing this male gaze. Victor Lebrun intentionally positions himself where he commands a view of Edna's face. Chopin's linguistic choices explicitly suggest masculine superiority. Even after her awakening, Edna never goes beyond the male characters' influence. When she quits her husband's subjugation and moves to the pigeon-house, her desires for Lebrun and Alcee Arobin overshadow her. Edna's wishes reflect an appreciation of her sexuality rather than a social and gender rebellion. She remains in the feminine social precepts, as evidenced by the value of her wedding ring. After meeting Léonce, she silently reaches out to him, and he, understanding, take the rings from his vest pocket and drops them into her open palm (Chopin, 1899, p.4).

The analysis below explores how Edna Pontellier is released from these oppressions, as stated in the previous sections. Edna in *The Awakening* is identified as the one and only leader of her life searching for her freedom. She can no longer remain quiet after experiencing such oppression by her husband and the higher-class Creole society. To free herself, she carries out many liberating acts. Edna has got the right time to release herself from the oppression. She frees herself from the constraints and oppressions of the class differences imposed on her gender and accomplishes whatever she wants. Therefore, Edna decides not to obey her husband's order but rather to be a frontal person. As Tyson (2011) argues, the rebellious woman

is a shield. The defense would not be aware of the experiences under which they exploit them (p. 83).

Gender inequality leads Edna to refuse the oppression. She can no longer accept the pressure her husband has against her. She remains quiet from the beginning and meets the needs of her husband. She is not a mother-woman disabling her to love her family in abundance. The more feminist understanding she has, the more freedom she likes to attain from manly suppression. Miller argues that this kind of sexual discrimination results from male constructions, "… our culture creates women as repositories for a myriad of devalued and denied psychological qualities…" (as cited in Chodorow, 1976, p. 479). The objectification of women's sex induces a lack of self in women and causes women's isolation as individuals. This objectification makes women believe that they are just objects, not free individuals.

Therefore, submitting oneself to the male conceptualization of manhood yields no positive outcome for the female identity. As a result, women understand that they must go against a male ruling society to emancipate their personality because the struggle for a woman is to free herself from being an object or possession defined in her functions or owned by others (Killeen, 2003, p. 419).

2.2. Motherhood

The subject of motherhood has acquired various viewpoints since the rise of the second wave of feminism. During this second wave, though, motherhood has been far more seriously debated than before. Motherhood is observed as a socially constructed responsibility for women. This idea challenges the traditional notion that motherhood is "natural" to women. Moreover, they blame the institution of motherhood to be an oppressive institution that powerfully controls women's position. In the 1960s, the concept of motherhood played a crucial role in defining women's role in society. According to Beauvoir, the pioneer of the second wave movement, the so-called natural motherly women role is the principal cause for their injustice in society. An essay by Patterson on Beauvoir and the demystification of

motherhood says that [the]women drag themselves into slavery by making the decision of getting married and having children (Patterson, 1986, p. 87). She sees maternity acts as an obstacle to acquiring liberation in society, and this is the reason why she personally has no children.

Male-dominated society has given women only the role of wives as sex objects, child-bearers, and commodities (Chodorow, 1994, pp. 44-45). Others who have the bravery to transcend the limits of this conventional definition of the concept of femininity have to withstand the result of their brave undertaking. In *The Awakening*, Chopin conveys such a daring attempt made by Edna Pontellier. Likewise, Edna is aware of male-defined femininity and feels she is constricted by it. This somehow forces her to dedicate her suffocating soul and life to a marriage makes her feel imprisoned. Her futile efforts to achieve women's liberation bring her a tragic end. A woman's primary social role is described as a good wife and a mother. Any woman who does not possess these stereotypical characteristics is not defined as true womanhood (Schweitzer, 1990, p. 168).

There is a formidable hurdle between a man and a woman in such a patriarchal system, in which different tasks weigh down on both men and women. Women are expected to stay home to complete household chores daily and represent the emotional side. A woman is expected to give her family all of her love, and she must provide the husband and the children a comfortable home by holding onto the patriarchal system and meeting their needs. In *The Awakening*, her husband reproves Edna for neglecting her children. There are no strict written rules that put a woman in charge of the children in the family. For the husband, it is only the mother's job to look after the children, and if it is not the mother, then who takes care of the children? Who will do this? Léonce places his business above everything else, even above his family and kids. He refuses to look after his children and thinks that the business is more important than caring and giving love to his children.

This novel considers the creation of an ideal woman and her motherhood as Creole. Patriarchal men have long been expressing their wishes to women in two images: an angel and a monster, "Male dread of women, and specifically the infantile dread of maternal autonomy, has historically objectified itself in vilification of

women, while male ambivalence about female charms underlies the traditional images of such terrible sorceress-goddesses" (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000, p. 34). The women's representation is used to display the contrasting feelings of men. They love women and want to be close to them while they fear them at the same time. Beauvoir (1956) says,

> the Woman-Mother has a face of shadows: she is the chaos whence all have come and whither all must one day return; she is Nothingness "and" in all civilizations and still in our day woman inspires man with horror; it is the horror of his carnal contingence, which he projects upon her. (pp.166 - 167)

Men create representations of monsters and angels because of their fear and love for women. Both monster and angel representations of women in Creole tradition are not real things; they are power-building products. This image, an angel or monster, is enforced by men. At the same time, in this novel, Creole women are set stereotypical represented by Madame Ratignolle, which complies with patriarchy and Creole society's requirements. Edna understands that her place and personality are becoming more conscious and different from other women in her community. In comparison to Edna, Madame Ratignolle's inner state is static and rigid. The building of Madame Ratignolle, which acts as a foil for white American women, is enforced by the patriarchy and Creole culture, which finally forms the distinction between mother-woman Madame Ratignolle and not mother-woman (Chopin, 1899, p. 88).

The main objective of a patriarchal society is to make women submissive. As a result, women and men in a patriarchal society play different roles. Women exist only as women and as mothers. Meanwhile, men are the head of a family that should achieve economic prosperity for their families. Chopin depicts women who have assumed various styles of female roles in this patriarchal society. Adele Ratignolle is portrayed as a patriarchal woman and is described by Tyson (2015) as a woman who idolizes their children and worships her husband (p. 86). On the other hand, Mademoiselle Reisz is portrayed as a emancipated woman who does not comply with gender roles, living openly and independently (Seyersted, 1969, p. 103). Chopin's portrayal of Mademoiselle Reisz's clarity of mind versus Edna's quest exemplifies a clear distinction between the two characters. Madame Reisz's

character, in the novel, sets a perfect example of being the only woman with a valid identity who does not need a man at all.

> Mademoiselle Reisz functions as the only example of a free, independent woman whose hardiness Edna must emulate if she is to succeed and soar above "tradition and prejudice." There is no question that the older woman provides Edna with a more viable model than Adele Ratignolle, who is, after all, trapped without even knowing it. (Thornton,1980, p.55)

Against all these other forms, while Edna Pontellier is represented as the modern woman, striving for emancipation, independence, and challenges contemporary standards and traditional expectations, Adèle Ratignolle, who is both a mother and a loving wife, on the other hand, is portrayed as the ideal woman in *The Awakening*. She makes winter clothes for her kids all summer long and seems to spend her life with her children and husband. Every time she is referred, she is either called a mother or a wife. Kearns (1991) puts it as follows:

> One is nonetheless seldom vouchsafed more than a glimpse of Adèle at her most stereotypically "feminine"—sorting laundry, nurturing her husband, having her baby. We see of their conversation hardly flattering to Adèle, as she also takes on Leonce's admonitory tones. (pp, 70-71)

She exemplifies a good mother-woman role that Chopin calls: the word itself means that she is not an actual human, and Edna is not a good mother-woman. Edna's husband blames her for failing to care for his kids properly without stating a clear reason for how and why she fails. However, the readers learn later in the story that Edna is found guilty of not paying enough attention to their children several times. Mr. Pontellier thinks that Edna is not, in Chopin's terms, a mother-woman.

> In short, Mrs. Pontellier was not a mother-woman. The mother women seemed to prevail that summer at Grand Isle. It was easy to know them, fluttering about with extended, protecting wings when any harm, real or imaginary, threatened their precious brood. They were women, who idolized their children, worshipped their husbands, and esteemed it a holy privilege to efface themselves as individuals and growing wings as ministering angels. (p. 12)

According to motherhood, independence and self-identity are two qualities and rights that cannot be attained by a woman. A proper mother-woman role, according to the male lexicon, is the one who devotes herself spiritually and physically to her husband and children. The quotation describes Edna's behaviour, which is different from the women's actions. Her behaviour is far from being labelled as a good

mother-woman. She is not a Creole, and she is different from any other Creole women, most of whom are mother women: “Mrs. Pontellier, though she had married a Creole, was not thoroughly at home in the society of Creoles; never before had she been thrown so intimately among them” (Chopin,1899, p. 12). The Creole society has features that are not appropriate for her.

It is difficult for Edna to deal with the idea that her husband is likened to by everyone. This can be understood from the following lines of Chopin (1899) easily: “all declare that Mr. Pontellier was the best husband in the world […] Mr. Pontellier was a great favorite, and ladies, men, children, even nurses, were always on hand to say good-bye to him” (p. 9).When Edna tells the guests around the dining table a story, Edna mentions a woman who paddle[s] away with her lover one night in a pirogue and never come[s] back (Chopin, 1899, p. 75). The tale she speaks vividly illustrates her weariness in marriage and her life as a mother and wife, which society expects. Edna realizes that she must part ways with her children and husband to recover her individuality. When Janet (Edna’s sister) invites her younger sister to her marriage, Edna refuses by saying that wedding is one of the most lamentable spectacles on earth (p. 71). The protagonist here realizes that marriage inevitably steals the self-definition of the woman. Housework, primarily linked to marriage as an institution, depends on the female sex. The father becomes the invisible father because most of his work takes him out of the house, and his active presence decreases gradually in the household (Chodorow, 1994, p. 50).

Men do not have to bother about housework and childcare because of their sex, as indicated above. He is the breadwinner while the sex of women entails them to handle the tasks at home and take care of the children. The nature of their duty requires significant work. To show the gender discrimination women face, Killeen (2003) claims, “because the burden of nature falls on one sex to a much greater extent than the other, women necessarily have to bear a heavier burden” (p. 418). Such oppression compounded by social roles and norms and collapsing marriage contributes to the killing and decreasing the woman’s soul. Every weekend, Mr. Pontellier returns home when Edna settles at Grand Isle, the narrator reveals. He becomes an imperceptible father figure that comes home only at the weekends while

Edna has a house of her own as a mother and manages it. Such an intense self-sacrificing wound consumes the individual's womanly self.

Streater (2007) opines, "to become a wife and mother is, on some level, to capitulate oneself to patriarchal systems" (p. 406). According to Streater, women's sheer energy is acquired by a crude attempt to play the role of a mother and wife. Such an attempt unconsciously or unthinkably ruins women. For their husband's and children's sake, they sacrifice their selfhood and identity. Moreover, maternity, being a concept constructed by men, deconstructs the female personality. It fragments because women are characterized by a male maternity building. Both reject their identity and constantly strengthen their inferior status (Streater, 2007, p. 407). Females are supposed to do their best blindfolded and give their all to be considered good mothers for the sake of motherhood.

Chodorow (1994) affirms that a strict relationship exists between men's and women's social roles. The social status of women paralyzes the individual's identity and the woman's self. These socially dedicated and unprotected women are called little women without childhood experience, while men openly enjoy childhood as Chodorow's critical justification (p. 54). There is such a social system that the main character is contained in, and usually, they are limited to act within certain social roles. They are seen as the devoted wife of a man who worships her (Chopin, 1899, p. 22).

Feminine personalities and female identity shall only judge women's capacity to fulfil their social roles under patriarchal norms. Instead of integrating women and the entirety of females' psyche, culture prioritizes only conventional sex roles. This suggests that according to the patriarchy, what traditional women demand is total social conformity. Edna Pontellier is tired of these socially determined gender roles for women. She gradually realizes that her autonomy and female identity is significantly threatened by social compliance. She compromises herself and autonomy by refusing to subdue her life to society's desires and vision. The novel makes it clear to readers that Edna's vision of children has changed drastically. Since she conceives that the war of Edna's selfishness includes denial of her duties as a mother, she began to describe her children as antagonistic (Chopin,1899, p. 48).

As Schweitzer (1990) observes, Edna rejects her role as a mother to attain her independence (p. 162). In Killeen's (2003) terms, "... motherhood is dangerous and painfully rites of passage for women, against which they should fight" (p. 418). To achieve one's self, one has to detach herself from motherhood, and that is the only way to acquire independence and autonomy. Edna's friend describes her as a child since she denies her destiny as a mother, "you seem like a child to me in a certain manner Edna" (Chopin,1899, p. 106). Edna has irrational behaviour, just like children. She behaves and thinks regardless of her husband and her children. Edna does not always want to be with her children, but instead, she likes her solitude when she sends them to their grandma's house:

> She was fond of her children in an uneven, impulsive way. She would sometimes gather them passionately to her heart; she would sometimes forget them…Their absence was a sort of relief, though she did not admit this, even to herself. It seemed to free her of a responsibility which she had blindly assumed and for which Fate had not fitted her. (Chopin,1899, p. 21)

The quote illustrates that she prefers to have time for herself instead of spending it with her kids. In Edna's situation, the way she thinks and behaves against her children is a visible imbalance. She sometimes loves them so much but sometimes forgets them all together. At this point, she cannot admit to herself that she enjoys being without her children. In this case, her kids become oppressors and a burden on her shoulders. Dix (1976) puts it in the following way: "chief and foremost among these oppressors are children. In her desire to be a good mother, and to do everything possible for her child's welfare, the average mother permits herself to be made a martyr before she realizes it" (p.128). This is regarded as a deeply rooted fault among women described earlier. Placing their own needs before their family's and kids' makes them feel bad. Society expects them to be committed to their husbands and children; otherwise, they are accused of selfishness when prioritizing their feelings and needs.

> In all of the opinions the women express regarding the topic of motherhood, none of them blame the children themselves for any of the struggles they face. Rather, they are bitter that biology determines such an important part of their lives without them having much of a choice. As Edna witnesses Adèle giving birth to her child, her bitterness comes to view in one single sentence: with an inward agony, with a flaming, outspoken revolt against the ways of Nature, she witnessed the scene of torture. (Chopin, 1899, p. 146)

Without the context, this sentence could refer to a scene of a murder or some other violent situation. A woman giving birth to a baby comes with such responsibility that she feels her freedom is taken away from her. Kearns (1991) puts it as follows: "She is eaten up by them and regenerated day after day, making nihilism a perpetually reiterated torture. She can feel that she exists as long as her children" (p.77). In *The Awakening*, the same situation is noticed in Edna's relationship with her children. As long as her children need her, Edna cannot survive without hurting her children; she cannot free herself from society's demands. For instance, Adele warns Edna when she leaves after Adele's birth and says, "think of the children" (Chopin, 1899, p. 146). According to Franklin (1984),

> Adele's 'Think of the children' reminds Edna of her duty and may suggest, at least subconsciously to her, the reality that, if she lives as a fully sexual woman, a state to which she has now awakened, she will likely have to think of some future children, a horrid idea to one struggling so desperately for her independence. (p. 525)

She is still not sure what this could mean for her but somehow thinks whatever she says must be right. However, later, she realizes that "they [should not think] they could possess her, body and soul" (Chopin, 1899, p. 152). She is such a character that never stops trying and finally realizes how she could escape from all of this. Her conversation with Adèle shows her thorough and critical thinking, and thus surprises Madame Ratignolle by telling her:

> I would give up the unessential; I would give my money, I would give my life for my children, but I wouldn't give myself. I can't make it more clear; it's only something which I am beginning to comprehend, which is revealing itself to me. (Chopin,1899, p. 92)

She does not understand why mothers should give their precious children all their lives. Each mother gives her family the best and lives for her family—no matter what happens. Edna does not do the same because she thinks that a mother should do something special. She can compromise something without exception. Edna wants to offer only unnecessary things she has for her children. Robert, her summer love at Grand Isle, helps her realize the woman she wants to be by stimulating and activating her emotions such as passion, love and desire, and this interaction changes her. As a result, she can break the mindset that for years has engulfed her. She does not want

to be the traditional woman of the time who gives up her life–and soul due to her children,

> In short, Mrs. Pontellier was beginning to realize her position in the universe as a human being, and to recognize her relations as an individual to the world within and about her. This may seem like a ponderous weight of wisdom to descend upon the soul of a young woman of twenty-eight—perhaps more wisdom than the Holy Ghost is usually pleased to vouchsafe to any woman. (Chopin ,1899, p. 33)

The quote clarifies why she did not vary from other women before that summer weekend. She is a typical mother with two children, but she changes her mind and thoughts during that summer weekend. She cannot fit in the domestic life of a family: "glimpse of domestic harmony which had been offered her, gave her no regret, no longing. It was not a condition of life which fitted her. She could see in it but an appalling and hopeless ennui" (Chopin,1899, p. 63). For Edna, it becomes foolish to lead a life as an obedient wife devoted to her husband and children. It seems to be the utmost folly for a woman at the head of a household and the mother of children to spend in days which would be better employed contriving for the comfort of her family.

> A feeling of exultation overtook her, as if some power of significant import had been given her to control the working of her body and her soul. She grew daring and reckless, overestimating her strength. She wanted to swim far out, where no woman had swum before. (Chopin, 1899, p. 31)

This quote means she is now able to have the power to be in charge of her body. She likes this sense of self-autonomy and the power of her body and soul. This swim is her feminist notion, which most women do not practice at the time. Then, she reveals her inability to do the things people ask of her. Her husband demands that she enter the house, but she refuses to comply with his offer. "Léonce, go to bed', she said. 'I mean to stay out here. I do not wish to go in, and I don't intend to. Don't speak to me like that again; I shall not answer you" (Chopin, 1899, p. 53). She prefers to do things in her self-interest, without concern for others, such as leaving her house chores, going out alone, and coming home late. The following quotes illustrate her changing behaviour: "She began to do as she liked and to feel as she liked…She made no ineffectual efforts to conduct her household" (Chopin,1899, p. 63). As noticed in the novel, motherhood is still conceived as an institution. When Edna is bending to kiss her friend goodbye, Adele presses her friend's cheek gently

and whispers in an exhausted voice, “Think of the children Edna, oh think of the children! Remember them!” (Chopin, 1899, p. 63). In this case, she does not remember her children but the institution of motherhood. She tries to reveal her changing feelings to Dr. Mandelet, saying,

> But I do not want anything but my way. That is enjoying a good deal, of course, when you have to trample upon the lives, the hearts, the prejudices of others but no matter still, I should not want to trample on the little lives. (Chopin,1899, p.99)

Edna is not a monster but someone who tries to determine what she wants and why she likes it so severely while still struggling with feeling worried about ruining her children’s life. She asks Dr. Mandelet not to blame her for anything, not because she fears his moral judgment or society, but because she recognizes that she has attitudes different from those around her.

Western societies invariably stigmatize women who abandon their children as being monstrous, emotionally stunted, or insufficient. Society views such mothers unfairly without granting them the right to autonomy and personality. Edna remembers Adele’s voice whispering, ‘Think of the children; think of them.’ She means to think of them; that determination had driven into her soul like a death wound—but not to-night. To-morrow would be time to think of everything” (Chopin, 1899, p. 124). “She had said over and over to herself, ‘To-day it is Arobin; to-morrow it will be someone else. It makes no difference to me; it doesn’t matter about Léonce Pontellier, but Raoul and Etienne!” (Chopin, 1899, p. 126). Edna rethinks the decisions again, and she worries about her children’s future if she persists in her behaviour. Indeed, she feels that she is enclosed in the dominance of men: her lover and her husband. She does not regret gaining her autonomy and independence, but she feels concerned about how people would approach her children with prejudice because of their mother’s behaviour. She hates the feeling that her children will be looked down on by society for their mother’s behaviour, which differs significantly from other mothers’ and women at that time. Her independence and autonomy are impeded by her husband and children, who have power and influence over her.

The main aim of liberation in her life is to pursue freedom. Freedom means freeing yourself from the household’s burden that affects your entire life and the

freedom to be the person you have never been before. That is what she wants to be and does what makes her happy without being manipulated by capitalists (businesses) or the responsibilities that she has in her private life (children, husband, and the household).

2.3. Spiritual Liberation of Women

According to Beauvoir's (1956) *The Second Sex*, she adopts existentialist terms in her writings to examine why a woman is seen as different from a man; the woman represents the inessential to the essential. As a philosophy, existentialism emphasizes the importance of an individual's life as a conscious being before society's position. Beauvoir, the revered promoter of existential feminism, discusses the notion of the other, which promotes women's emancipation and economic freedom. In her pursuit of clarification of women's suppression for centuries, she tries to discern the reason for women's subordination from biological, historical, and psychological aspects even in connection with the master-slave dialectic.

Beauvoir (1956) states, "a woman is shut up in a kitchen or boudoir- so her horizon is limited. Her wings are clipped, and it's found deplorable that she cannot fly" (p. 80). While Moi (2009) says that "a woman defines herself through the way she lives her embodied situation in world […] she makes something of what the world makes of her…this process of making and being made is open-ended; it ends only with death" (pp. 189-198). Edna follows the steps of her awakened consciousness, but her futile life compared to others leads her to submerge herself in the sea. Mademoiselle Reisz asserts that an artist's wings need to be robust so that they can move beyond the limits of tradition as a warning to Edna. Edna likes painting and listening to music in her spare time, but it is perceived to be a harmful practice for women at the time. And this awakening of hers leads to her death eventually.

In her distress, she goes to the sea, Grand Isle, where she has never swum before. She wants to ensure that people do not see her death as a suicide, and hence she asks for dinner after swimming to look like a swimming accident: "What time

will you have dinner? ask Edna. I'm very hungry, but do not get anything extra" (Chopin, 1899, p. 126). She says this to Victor Lebrun and Mariequita and gives them no reason to think she is not coming back. As she walks away but does not do anything extra, she said "do you know, I have a notion of going down to the beach and take a good wash and even a little swim, before dinner?" (p. 126). She thinks her kids should know that she dies accidentally, not through some sensational events: "She thought of Leonce and the children. They were a part of her life, But they need not have thought that they could possess her, body and soul" and "it makes no difference to me, it doesn't matter about Leonce Pontellier—but Raoul and Etienne!" (Chopin, 1899, p. 127). These quotes indicate that she cares about her kids but cannot do anything to help them and gain her freedom; therefore, she sees no escape, only suicide.

Edna is not willing to go back to her husband Leonce because she knows she will lose her independence and liberation if she does so. Edna's experience portrays what it feels like not to return to the ordinary life she had before. Therefore, she does not have any other choice but to commit suicide. However, Edna has tried to build a sense of herself through a spiritual enlightenment restoration. She has been socially overwhelmed due to committing adultery, which is immoral for women to love another man, resulting in losing everything in her life: her husband, children, and lover. Edna is expected to show obedience to her husband and take care of her children, but she refuses to do so.

Eventually, this leads to her suicide. Despite the suicide, Edna believes that her self-awareness and understanding mean a lot more than her previous dull life. She can realize her emotional and sexual identity and act on her wishes. The discovery of her inner self is likened to awakening from sleep, as implied below:

> The years that are gone seem like dreams - if one might go on sleeping and dreaming but to wake up and find - oh! well! perhaps it is better to wake up, after all, even to suffer, rather than to remain a dupe to illusions all one's life… There are periods of despondency and suffering which take possession of me. But I don't want anything but my own way. (Chopin, 1899, p. 123)

The quotation demonstrates that self-awareness and acting upon her own will are more critical for Edna than living in compliance with social constraints, social

rules, and social standards, strictly adopted by her husband and her social community. Her thinking still reflects her feminist thought even in limitation. *The Awakening*'s end is vague and has invited analysts to make different interpretations.

Edna's last revolt is her suicide, which has been the topic discussed by many critics. Opinions vary concerning death by mistake or suicide due to grief for Robert's loss for a second time or a rebellion against nature. Yaeger (1987) argues that Edna feels forced to commit suicide because of a lack of communication (p. 199). Yaeger describes how Edna still lacks the connection she needs despite all her attempts and efforts, and she knows the connection is not possible (p. 199). Many consider it a failure, whereas others perceive it as a courageous act to reinforce Edna's sovereignty toward her society's imprisonment.

When dealing with love, a standard view is that after the illusion of romantic imagination has disappeared, she dies because, without love, she could not bear the world. This point of view gives the protagonist a specific growth as she begins to understand the world and her role in it, while others encourage Edna to die simply due to Robert's loss. Suicide would not merely become a positive reading. In "The Second Coming of the Aphrodite," Gilbert and Gubar (1984) propose that Edna may not even die but is reborn as Venus/love Aphrodite's goddess, which defies the patriarchal society (p. 33). The suicide of Edna is entirely faithful to the literary tradition of the nineteenth century. As Showalter (1986) points out, drowning is frequently used to punish women in the literature who go against new moral codes. Still, Chopin goes beyond the tradition and conveys a complex message in her novel (p. 218).

From all the points mentioned above, we conclude that one feminist character in *The Awakening* is Edna Pontellier. She becomes a feminist because of societal norms and men's domination. Edna wants to stand as a woman, as a person, and not defined as a man's wife and as children's mother. Her feminist approach and acts raise questions on gender equality, patriarchy, and feminism. Moreover, Edna opposes the conventional patriarchal family structure. She rejects being a wife or a traditional mother. In all its forms, the main problem of feminism is that the patriarchal system uses all types of oppression against women to devalue them. Even

though the two genders are human beings, inequality between men and women exists in patriarchal societies.

A woman is created to be in a patriarchal society, ensuring her inferior status. Edna's main struggles are marriage and motherhood. She wishes to avoid limitations and restrictions and wants to accomplish her self-worth, but realizing she cannot do so, she loses her will to live. Almost all middle-class women face the same struggles and problems as Edna experiences in the novel in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. We conclude that the end of the novel tells a woman's failure to find her individuality. The novel is still about a woman's struggles to escape her imprisonment and find her identity that feminism is still struggling with the patriarchal society.

THIRD CHAPTER

1. WOMEN'S STRUGGLE FOR FREEDOM IN *THE HOUSE OF MIRTH*

The House of Mirth (1905) is a novel written by Edith Wharton, and Lily Bart is the protagonist in the novel. She is 29 years old and descended from once a prominent and affluent family. Lily moves in with her aunt Mrs. Peniston after her father goes bankrupt and her mother passes away. Though impoverished, Lily is breathtakingly beautiful and has an excellent reputation and exemplary manners. Lily's exceptional qualities make her one of New York's wealthiest and most influential figures. She spends lots of money to keep up with her friends. She also needs money to feel a sense of belonging in the leisure class. Thus, she is aware that this could be sustained if she marries a wealthy man. As the story unfolds, however, her chances of finding a suitable husband diminish, and despite her deft maneuvering, she never succeeds. Even though Lily joins the working class, she soon discovers she cannot support herself anymore. Finally, Lily cannot free herself from patriarchal society's constraints, so she prefers death rather than living under society's oppression.

3.1. Gender and Oppression in *The House of Mirth*

In *The House of Mirth* (1905), Wharton represents women oppressed and marginalized by patriarchal high society in New York. Given that women in the novel suffer under the powers of patriarchal and social norms, they struggle to seek their happiness by refusing to obey the tradition. Marriage is the primary aim of women's lives, while Lily refuses to be known as her society's other women. Her exceptional characteristics are considered undesirable because they violate social norms. Women in the novel are traditionally raised to marry and to represent facets of their husband's fortune. They are regarded as ornamental (Wharton, 2008, p .415)

and respected only for their appearances. They have no freedom to behave freely and are bound by the societal rules imposed upon them.

Women, like all humans, struggle around for the sake of happiness. Their definition of happiness varies from one woman to another. The female characters in the novel strive to find their happiness and survive. Women are portrayed in *The House of Mirth* as inferior in Old New York's patriarchal society. It is appropriate to note that the novel is written when men go to work and women stay in the home, where their role is limited to housekeeping. Women are traditionally expected to take care of the home and family and raise their children, in contrast to a man with a public world marked by economic struggle, political and social rivalry. Women are conditioned to be submissive and helpless from a young age. Thus, social standards favor men, and women are considered less important than men. Women have less strength, prestige, and respect than men. In literature, and general society, by depicting women as domestic and simple, female stereotypes are born, and in turn, women are forced to live up to those stereotypes (Griffith, 2010). Therefore, a primary relationship between the sexes is best defined as dominance and subordination, which combines a slave element with a weak and servile one. The woman depends on the man; this dichotomy of gender is widely criticized for discriminating against women's economic and political rights.

In *The House of Mirth*, we shall recognize the connection between women's subordination and more visible forms of slavery. Wharton believes in the impossibility of females escaping from men's servitude. Males are sometimes depicted as lords in Wharton's novel. The only difference in their personality is how their female is treated with compassion and sometimes in disgust. In *The Second Sex* (1956), Beauvoir argues that French and Western societies are patriarchal and disregard and marginalized women. Beauvoir is committed to the idea that women are not born as low creatures but have to become so. She advocates women to be self-aware and avoids being the other.

Lily Bart is the heroine of *The House of Mirth*. She is a challenging character who breaks multiple social codes. Lily's character represents Wharton's personality. Since she lives in a patriarchal system, she could never do anything, and her hopes

and aspirations are forbidden. At the turn of the twentieth century, women lived marginalized in a society dominated by social manners and laws of conduct made by men. Lily is chained; she has no chance to flee her patriarchal society. The high society forces women to get married, usually for financial and social status (Johansson, 2011).

Lily is the embodiment of the notion of marriage securing personal finance and affording personal luxury. She opposes matrimony because of the need for a man and wealth. Lily's rejection is a direct challenge to her culture's values that are based on male domination. On the other hand, she is a victim of her society's expectations, and she struggles to live up to male and societal domination. Victorian English women are tired of the theme of inequality and injustice exposed to them by men. In the novel, Wharton discusses the roles of men and women starting very early on in his book. Selden acts as an observer, and Lily is viewed as a decoration and an object. We first see Lily through Selden's eyes as she stands at a busy train station. She stands out from the crowd. As she turns to Selden and smiles, he remarks:

> He had never seen her more radiant. Her vivid head relieved against the dull tints of the crowd made her more conspicuous than in a ballroom, and under her dark hat and veil, she regained the girlish smoothness, the purity of tint, that she was beginning to lose after eleven years of late hours and indefatigable dancing. (Wharton, 2008, p.2)

It is indicated that Selden objectifies Lily for her body at the beginning of the novel. In our first impression of Lily, we are instantly introduced to her image as an object to be consumed. For example, Seldon wonders the possibly Lily; "must have cost a great deal to make" and comments on her "qualities distinguishing her from the herd of her sex" that are "chiefly external" and also severely de-humanized (Wharton, 2008, p. 5). He claims that she has "chiefly external" qualities that attract most of the novel's men. Besides, Seldon notices her hand, "polished as a bit of old ivory with its slender pink nails," and reassures her financial worries by responding to her that "there must be plenty of capital on the look-out for such an investment" (Wharton, 2008, p.8).

Seldon paints lily as an expensive item (although beautiful) that needs a tremendous financial expenditure to possess her. Lily often begins to see herself as a product just as others see her. Much like she commodifies herself, she commodifies

her future marriage partners. Although Lily participates in this commodification, she only participates in merchandise sold by men with some possible influence over who has bought her.

Inside the New York high society, the majority of men are dominating women's freedom. Women are not in charge of making decisions, which is evident in Lily's conversation with Lawrence Seldon; "Ah, there's the difference – a girl must, a man may if he chooses" (Wharton, 2008, p.15). Seldon is a single man who supports himself by working as a lawyer to earn a little money. There are no social constraints imposed upon him, and men do whatever he requests. However, Lily is expected to look beautiful and elegant. If her fortune is no longer adequate for a life of leisure, she should marry to remain alive and avoid failure. As she says,

> Your coat's a little shabby—but who cares? It doesn't keep people from asking you to dine. If I were shabby, no one would have me: a woman is asked out as much for her clothes as for herself. The clothes are the background, the frame, if you like: they don't make success, but they are a part of it. Who wants a dingy woman? We are expected to be pretty and well-dressed till we drop—and if we can't keep it up alone, we have to go into partnership. (Wharton, 2008, p. 15)

Seldon, as the only male character in *The House of Mirth*, sees Lily beyond her beauty and elegance. He is different from other men because he encourages Lily to express herself as she wishes. Lily wants a more modern way of life. She decides to break away from contemporary social norms. Simultaneously, Lily notices that men are granted privilege by having their private and personal room and space. Selden's apartment is "a small library, dark but cheerful, with its walls of books, a pleasantly faded Turkey rug, a littered desk" where invited Lily to "sink with a sigh into one of the shabby leather chairs" (Wharton, 2008, p. 7). She regards his home with respect and regrets her fate as a woman: "How delicious to have a place like this all to one's self! What a miserable thing it is to be a woman" (Wharton, 2008, p.7). Lily understands that gender inequality exists, and she does not have the same right to choose her life as Selden.

In the novel's opening pages, Lawrence Seldon observes Lily Bart throughout the novel. He says, "She so evidently the victim of the civilization which produces her, that the links of her bracelet seem like manacles chaining her to her fate"

(Wharton, 2008, p. 8). Lily is bound to the society in which she lives, and the use of the word victim implies that she does not hold absolute control over her fate. She cannot avoid the demands that are imposed upon her. Society determines what will become of her since women are products of the New York leisure class.

Wharton reveals the fatalistic essence of life for females. The notion that Lily must play the game society sets before her as her fate depends upon it. Although Lily is not as wealthy as some other women, her beauty sets her apart from her station's other girls. When Lily comments on women who live alone, she says, "Oh, governesses—or widows. But not girls—not poor, miserable, marriageable girls!" (Wharton, 2008, p.7). Society may present Lily's current situation regarding where she should be, but Lily negatively sees her current situation. She says that poor, miserable, marriageable girls cannot experience the freedom of apartment living or even the sensation of arranging the furniture (Wharton, 2008, p.7). In Lily's view, home is the proper place of happiness; rearranging the furniture provides the possibility of freedom inside the household, which she does not experience—suggesting that marriageable girls live in a suspended state between girlhood and womanhood. Lily needs someone to take care of her. Though staying with her aunt, she does not understand what independent living means as she will go from her aunt's home to her husband's home.

Furthermore, Lily shows signs of buying into society's projection of the potential for happiness inside marriage when she mentions, "But we're so different, you know she likes being good, and I like being happy" (Wharton, 2008, p.7). This difference between good and happiness has a significant impact on how Lily lives her life. In Lily's universe, being happy equals achieving a life of prosperity and well-being, while being good implies living within a moral universe. In Lily's universe, the two generally do not coincide. To indicate that a woman like Gerty Farish, an unmarried woman living beyond the leisure class sphere, cannot be pleased within her independent lifestyle in becoming an unmarriageable person. Lily suggests that Gerty needs to get married to be happy.

Seldon introduces Lily to his concept of "republic of the spirit" as his ideology representing personal independence, creativity, and achievement (Wharton, 2008,

p.101). His republic of the spirit encourages her to feel free and peaceful. However, she feels chained to a destiny that she cannot avoid and is implied to succeed in finding a wealthy husband who offers her a luxurious lifestyle. He shows her shallow and pointless pursuits; “Then the best you can say for me is, that after struggling to get them I probably shan’t like them? She draws a deep breath. What a miserable future you foresee for me!” (Wharton, 2008, p.106). Seldon makes her feel serene, comfortable, love, and free from any constraining influence, unlike with her superficial rich friends who know nothing about her true self and making her feel alienated. In the novel, women cannot work outside of the domestic sphere, and men have the authority over those in the public sphere.

Lily Bart’s lack of understanding of financial matters exemplifies her exclusion from the public domain as a woman and marginalizes her. On the other hand, Lily enters the public domain with a man’s help, setting her apart from other heroines (Potočková, 2010). Gus Trenor oppresses Lily in her effort to make money on her own. He takes advantage of his financial acumen and riches to seek carnal relations with Lily. Gus Trenor tries to seduce Lily while he is a married man; he asserts his right to make a relationship with her by informing Lily that the man who pays for the dinner is generally allowed to have a seat at the table (Wharton, 2008, p. 220). Lily makes an effort to earn money, but she ends up selling herself. Thus, her effort to improve her financial situation leads to damages to her reputation.

The old title of the novel is ‘A Moment’s Ornament,’ references the attractive, pretty, and wealthy woman during Lily Bart’s time. Although Lily seems optimistic at the beginning of the story, she realizes her beauty and position within society over time while her economic situation worsens. She becomes more concerned with her appearance. Every wrinkle on her body starts to worry her. She goes out of control, thus struggling to find a place for herself: “To be a woman …is an art that involves being what one is not … the nature of woman is defined precisely in terms of being something for others” (Goode, 1976, p. 277). The strain on a woman to be a society’s ornament represents society’s ideal by overshadowing a woman’s personality. Lily is a prime example of this perplexity. Also, Selden’s perception helps the reader understand why society misunderstands a woman; the best example of the

misunderstanding between fact and pretense, the tableaux vivants, where Lily loves her role, can personify the perfect beauty and be substituted for her role

As a result, Lily is victimized by her context as a girl in this culture. Men are considered individuals and can attract money while women are primarily admired for their looks and beauty; as Berger et al. (1973) puts it, “men act, and women appear” (p. 47). The appreciation given to the women in this novel is only for the artistic value they provide to men; women are only seen as beautiful by the male eyes. Although Lily is raised to behave this way, she tries to maintain an identity apart from men, but she cannot do so, and this is why we can see she is losing her position in society. She refuses to sell herself and views herself as an individual. Lily discovers her true self: her talents, uniqueness, beauty, and elegance. Lily’s manipulation of others is another crucial part of her personality, another reason she spurns marriage proposals. As well as all the different forms of women’s oppression, Lily strives to extend her autonomous self-sufficiency further. Thus, she begins to demonstrate her superiority by using her appearance and her control over others. Lily realizes her attractiveness and beautiful appearance; Lily realizes the potential that her body and prettiness offer her. Therefore, she becomes interested in exploiting others to advance her career.

Rosedale and Seldon see Lily as a piece of art to be possessed and not a beautiful individual to admire, representing everyone’s perspective and preventing Lily from becoming an independent person without being married. In her efforts to not simply become a possession, Lily utilizes her most significant asset: attractiveness. Since Lily understands that she can influence others through art, she often sees herself and her appearance as an expression of an artwork. That is seen through Mrs. Bry’s tableaux, where Lily turns into an artistic masterpiece. Lily respects her beauty absolutely and takes much pride in herself as an artistic masterpiece: “The impulse to show herself in a splendid setting ... yields to the truer instinct of trusting to her unassisted beauty, and she chooses a picture without distracting accessories of dress or surroundings” (Wharton, 2008, p. 204). Instead of looking for ways to have fun with the scene, like distracting accessories of dress or surroundings, Lily focuses on her clothes and opts for the best possible look to impress the viewer. Lily seems to pine for physical appearance; she is also terrified

of being ugly, but her aversion to dingy objects seems more than just that. It is shown clearly in Lily's desires to be beautiful, and known; she wants to be wealthy, and she strives to live up to her societal position.

Restuccia (1987) argues that Wharton is trying to express the risk inherent in the female preoccupation with appearance and beauty: she employs her physical beauty and intellect to take advantage of those around her and manipulates them. Lily finds it challenging to solve her problems since her dignity, honor, and too much respect for herself constricts her from doing so. Lily chooses not to succumb to the oppression of a materialistic culture, and as a result, her unharmed pride becomes her end, and she commits suicide. Wharton's story is about a woman who must make sacrifices for her honor and dignity to gain her financial and social independence and lead a more stable life. According to Wharton, losing part of herself is a worse and more dangerous end than death. Cynthia Griffin Wolff (1977) says,

> Lily has adopted her society's images of women narrowly and literally. She has long practiced the art of making herself an exquisite decorative object, and under Selden's eye, she comes to think of herself as a moral object as well ... She learns to evoke approval and appreciation in others by a subtle and ingenious series of graceful postures. It is an art she has practiced so well and for so long that she can no longer conceive of herself as anything but those postures; she can formulate no other desire than the desire to be seen to advantage. (p.127)

Lily has lost herself in the performance of herself as others see her. She works very hard to look exciting, witty, and pretty to attract her friends in the crowd. Lily presents herself as attractive and socially advantageous to attract potential suitors. She actively performs to get the attention of men while they observe her. Lily fully represents the feminine role and never lives the typical feminine life of her time. She does not obey the societal expectations of traditional women of her era. Through the necessity of behaving in that way, Lily refuses this life and accepts her downfall. Wharton illustrates the suffocating constraints that women face through this reality. It is the only kind of life that Lily is allowed to know. Lily's life requires playing the stereotypical female role, but she refuses to accept the unhappiness that such a life would offer her. Lily has no other choice if she refuses this life; she cannot create a new life for herself.

Wharton discusses the reality that women no longer desire to play the role of an obedient wife and a mother, even though many women could not imagine living any other way. Lily is practically stuck on a course for the rest of her life with no way out. Lily is bound to a trajectory, and there is no chance of change in her life. Lily's actions often illustrate the challenges of a New Woman. Carroll Smith-Rosenberg (1986) says,

> Nineteenth-century American society provided but one socially respectable, nondeviant role for women—that of loving wife and mother. Thus women, who presumably came in assorted psychological and intellectual shapes and sizes, had to find adjustment in one prescribed social role, one that demanded continual self-abnegation and a desire to please others. (p.213)

The mentioned quotation represents women's role in the nineteenth century and their role as mothers and wives. Society rejects the ideas of new women who seek autonomy and free themselves from the constraints imposed by society. They must accept the traditional role of women by taking care of their families and pleasing others. This feeling of Lily herself being pushed into an unwanted position is represented as:

> I was just a screw or cog in the great machine I called life, and when I dropped out of it, I found I was of no use anywhere else. What can one do when one finds that one only fits into one hole? One must get to it or be thrown out into the rubbish heap. (Wharton, 2008, p.308)

Through the quote above, Lily points out that she knows that she will never be effective in getting away from patriarchal oppression because it will only lead her to a rubbish heap and not to any accomplishments or happiness. While Lily witnesses some of the new woman's attitudes, they end up with varying circumstances and success levels because of their wealth or poverty.

3.2. Motherhood and Marriage

Even though Edith Wharton never gives birth to a child, she writes about motherhood and mother and daughter relationship themes. Wharton emphasizes the idea that a daughter shows her obedience to her dominant mother figure. These women are so self-centered, competitive, and proprietorial that they use motherhood

to control their daughters. Wharton depicts Lily Bart as a tragicomic stylish New York socialite. Although Lily's mother passes away, she remains an important and influential figure in Lily's life. Lily does everything her mother tells or requires her to do, such as getting married to a wealthy man, even though she lacks the solid maternal figure needed to make this happen. Mrs. Bart dies before significant incidents to occur in the novel, but she remains an important and influential figure in Lily's life.

Mrs. Bart does not seem to exist during the novel's important scenes, but she still achieves passing her values on her daughter and even urges her senses for marriage. Lily, like her mother, sees a life of dinginess as unbearable. Lily's inability to fall into such poverty ties herself to the New York elite's socially restrictive environment. Mrs. Bart, whose sophisticated tastes far outweigh her husband's meager means, encourages her daughter to value only material goods. Mrs. Bart insists that her husband feels indebted to her, and she is never grateful for his care and generosity. She asks her husband if he expects her to live like a pig (Wharton, 2008, p. 43). When her husband has a negative reply, she says, "as a justification for… telephoning to the jeweler that he might, after all, send home the turquoise bracelet which Mrs. Bart look[s] at that morning." (Wharton, 2008, p. 43). The demand by Mrs. Bart for a turquoise bracelet recalls an earlier passage. Selden, examining the attire of Lily, remarks that she is so evidently the victim of the civilization which produces her that the links of her bracelet seem like manacles chaining her to her future (Wharton, 2008, p. 10). Wharton thus connects the bracelet that Mrs. Bart buys to the manacles, which imprisons Lily to not live metaphorically as a pig. Mrs. Bart cannot find any reasons to live if her husband acknowledges her financial ruin. Before passing the disgust to her only daughter, she gets overwhelmed by her dinginess; she dies of a deep disgust (Wharton, 2008, p. 52).

In reality, Mrs. Bart's preoccupation with the best and beautiful stuff comes to life in Lily's character. After her father gets ruined and subsequently dies, Lily remembers her mother's efforts to introduce her to society. Wharton portrays a mother figure motivated to make sure that her daughter gets married and attains her social and financial freedom. Wagner-Martin (1990) mentions that Lily's mother is shown to be uninterested in Lily, except as a commodity to buoy the family through

its financial misfortunes (p. 45). As Mrs. Bart loses control of her once enjoyed social status, she is only comforted by one idea: Lily's beauty contemplation. Mrs. Bart praises Lily's beauty and Lily herself. Through her study of Lily's beauty, she comes into view that the girl's beauty is like a weapon for social violence with which she can invoke her revenge (Wharton, 2008, p. 49).

Ultimately, it seems that her daughter is the only victim of the hostility of Mrs. Bart, who cannot escape the position which her mother has chosen as her beautiful object. Lily's mother exploits Lily, and she cannot imagine a life where she is more than just a beautiful face. Her intense need to be a visual focus moves her to show herself. As Mrs. Bart thinks, a good marriage is Lily's escape from her dark and gloomy world. Similarly, this same escape also gives Mrs. Bart hope when she loses hers (Wharton, 2008, p. 50). Lily is trained to this end, pointing out to her daughter what might be achieved through such a gift and dwelling on the awful warning of those who, in spite of it, fail to get what they want (Wharton, 2008, p. 49).

Furthermore, Mrs. Bart consistently criticizes acrimoniously against love matches (Wharton, 2008, p.49). Mr. Bart closes the heart of her daughter and prevents her from having romantic relationships marriage. For years after Mrs. Bart dies, Lily feels entrapped to fulfill her mother's expectation that she should marry a wealthy husband. "Lily [does] not need Mrs. Bart's comments … to foster her naturally lively taste for splendour" (Wharton, 2008, p. 44). Because Lily learns Mrs. Bart's perspective on life, she fails to meet her mother's goals to marry a wealthy, socially respected suitor and therefore assuage her mother's high ambitions for her. Miss Bart looks into the reasons for her failure and says, Miss Bart looks into the reasons for her "failure": Was it her fault, or did fate play a role? She recalled her mother saying to her with ferocious vindictiveness after they had lost their money, "But you'll get it all back—you will get it all back, with your face." (Wharton, 2008, p. 41). The main reason that leads Lily to fail is her mother. Lily neither can marry a high-ranking social man nor let herself marry a man she desires. Feeling her mother's presence results in repetitive failures of her conquests. She wants to fulfill her mother's demands for money and feels afraid of entering a marriage.

Lily's mother raises her to believe that men are the providers and women the homemakers and wives. Lily evaluates men based on their wealth and not their personality. Selden has no money, but he is worried about men like Rosedale or Gryce. Their wealth makes them a possible marriage match, whereas Selden's lack of funds makes him simply a money provider (Wharton, 2008, p.455). The high society in New York has limited womanhood thinking. Women have to uphold societal norms, but Lily goes against these social norms. Edith Wharton is forced to kill her heroines for being aliens to their societies. Their inner faces reject the unfair rules of society. The inability of Lily to live with free will leads her to a crisis of identity.

Lily lives on her family and friends' support, unlike women in her society who rely on their husbands. Gilbert and Gubar indicate that women are frequently portrayed in literary tradition as monsters or angels (as cited in Ryan, 2017, p. 123). Lily is described in Wharton's novel as rotten. Wharton also rebels against social conventions by giving her protagonists a lousy reputation. There is no room for evil women in society because society is not open to change. Ammons (1990) says,

> The House of Mirth does not idealize motherhood per se. It uses an image of motherhood to reinforce its criticism of American marriage, especially in the leisure class, which is so obsessed with producing ornamental wives that the companionate potential of the institution is missed (p. 356).

Until Lily visits Nettie, she thinks that both men and women could only be business partners. Upon hearing Nettie's confession, she understands that marriage can give confidence and even love. Nettie's story helps Lily learn a new meaning in life. She realizes that it takes two to build the nest; the man's faith as well as the woman's courage (Wharton, 2008, p. 487). Lily learns the valid values of life in the place she fears and strives to escape in line with her upbringing. She feels deep inside that money is not the only thing in life, and what she needs is just to be happy. Lily never knows what her aim and purpose in life are. One thing is for sure that she just cannot change the path that her mother draws for her. Unfortunately for Lily, the thoughts expressed remain only in words; she finds no way to escape.

Lily goes on a journey of self-understanding and discovery. She is taught to look beautiful all her life and follow the superficial principles of social behavior that ignore the female inner side. Even her social circle members are shallow, who are committed to wealth and self-gratification. Women strive to preserve their richness, prominent social status, and leisure. Women in Lily's society live centered on fashionable jewelry, celebrations, luxurious parties, gambling and smoking, excursions, and hosting people who are significantly wealthier than they are. Lily feels she lives in a chaotic fake environment, in which people hide behind their sophisticated clothes and language. This view appears at one of Judy Trenor's dinners:

> She looked down the long table, studying its occupants one by one, from Gus Trenor, with his heavy carnivorous head sunk between his shoulders, as he preyed on a jellied plover, to his wife, at the opposite end of the long bank of orchids, suggestive, with her glaring good-looks, of a jeweller's window lit by electricity. And between the two, what a long stretch of vacuity! How dreary and trivial these people were! (Wharton, 2008, p. 81).

Lily is different from other women because she refuses to marry for money and looks for love. Because suitors do not satisfy her requests, she wastes reasonable marriage offers.

Lily's rejection of marriage is a rebellion against the social conventions as Seldon discusses Lily with Gerty: "She might have married more than once—the conventional rich marriage which she is taught to consider the sole of her existence—but when the opportunity comes, she always shrinks from it" (Wharton, 2008, p. 237). Women have always been dependent on men throughout history. Beauvoir encourages women to realize themselves and stop being the other in their writings by encouraging women's independence.

Despite their society's conventions, Gerty Farish is among those women trying to live independently in the novel. She is a spinster who lives alone, supports herself, and does volunteer work in her free time. Although society rejects the idea of women living by themselves, Gerty challenges her society's ideals and works to support women striving for independence, freedom, and autonomy. Gerty is much happier than Lily even is Gerty is a spinster, but she is free of any social restrictions, unlike Lily, who is caught in her society and unable to be herself. Lily views her society as

a cage in which she is locked and thinks how alluring the world outside the cage appears to her (Wharton, 2008, p. 81).

Lily lives in a world where marriage acts as the only option for women who want to remain financially stable, which marks the potential for happiness. Moreover, given that society offers these women only one option for financial security, equating happiness with financial security is an essential deterrent for women to separate from society's expectations. Beauvoir (1956) states, "the destiny that society offers women is marriage … Marriage is the reference by which the single woman is defined, whether she is frustrated by, disgusted at, or even indifferent to this institutional" (p.439). Groomed to be wives from childhood, women have not the skills to build a life outside marriage. Beauvoir (1956) says, "their normal destiny is marriage, which still means practically subordination to man; for masculine prestige is far from extinction, resting still upon solid economic and social foundations" (p. 29). Wharton, in her novel, indicates how society oppresses and punishes women who deviate from the norms of patriarchal society. Society sees women as unstable because they reject the status quo, which brings the potential for widespread changes.

Lily is forced to marry a rich man interested in achieving happiness and social success in New York's high society. She aims for a marriage that preserves her aristocratic character, accompanied by love. Lily is pursuing her happiness by abandoning the house of Mrs. Peniston, which she considers a prison, "she feels as though she is buried alive in the stifling limits of Mrs. Peniston's existence" (Wharton, 2008, p. 151). Lily lives in a shallow and frigid world, her society, and her friends of New York's high society. Lily's friends overlook her personal interests. She is considered a burden for people close to her because she is still a spinster: "my best friends—well, they use me or abuse me; but they don't care a straw of what happens to me. I've been about too long—people are getting tired of me; they are beginning to say I ought to marry" (Wharton, 2008, p. 11). Their view is built upon the old social conventions of New York that view women as beings whose primary purpose in life is marriage; as Selden mentions, "Isn't marriage your vocation? Isn't it what you are all brought up for?" (Wharton, 2008, p. 11). Selden describes marriage as a vocation for the constant rivalry of women in hunting rich men.

Lily is trying to marry a rich man but finds her suitors insufficient to meet her personal needs. She strives for matrimony, which encompasses spiritual and economic prosperity. For women from high society, spirituality, feelings, and emotions are of simple importance, focusing in the first place on the amount of money that men have in their pockets. Unlike other women in her society, Lily feels alienated because of her incapacity to be herself. Selden requests Lily to leave the materialist world of the house of mirth because she feels depressed because of gambling and losing money. As the story develops, the main question is not which man Lily will choose but why she cannot consider someone's marriage proposal. Still, she mainly concentrates on what makes wealth and social prestige so vital to Lily but impossible to obtain it except through marriage (Karcher, 1984, p. 232).

Even though Lily is aware of her money despair, which only worsens as the narrative develops, she keeps rejecting marriage proposals. There are some reasons why Lily continuously rejects these proposals: her investment in developing her identity and her manipulation power causes men to fall in love with her. Lily chooses to place her pride above her practical needs over and over again, leading to her tragic downfall.

When investigating Lily's conduct in her ties with men, we can better understand her decision to abandon them. Lily's determination in sustaining her dignity and honor can easily be observed through her relationships with three men: Laurence Selden, Simon Rosedale, and Gus Trenor. Lily and Selden's friendship is worth noting since it completes the novel's conventional romantic element, and the pair falls in love. At first, Selden gets rejected by Lily untraditionally because he is not wealthy enough. While she is interested in him and enjoys his company, she prefers to live apart from Selden.

Lily goes to Selden's house in the first scene of the novel, where he proposes to her openly, and she replies, "You know I am horribly poor—and very expensive. I must have a great deal of money" (Wharton, 2008, p. 11). Quotation explains what Lily claims her main concern is—money—but also reveals this aspect of herself to be false later. Lily does not choose Percy Gryce, a rich but dull man, to be married

because Selden convinces her that she is more valuable than just getting married for money.

Gargano (1972) discusses further the decision by Lily to forgo the exploitation attempts of Gryce and says, “Lily’s worldly mistakes are disguised blessings: her final inability to marry Percy Gryce, after all, her preparations have been seductively made, stems from an innate trust in something less musty than a moneyed imbecile” (p. 140). According to Gargano (1972), Lily’s innate trust comes from her higher self-concept (p. 140). This higher concept of self can be shown as a reason why Lily cannot marry. Even though she thinks giving up on Gryce is a great choice she makes, she still feels furious towards Selden and cries: “Why do you do this to me?”, “Why do you make the things I have chosen to seem hateful to me if you have nothing to give me instead?” (Wharton, 2008, p. 107). Despite Lily’s anger, she adores Selden because he is the only person who understands that Lily deserves more than an unhappy marriage and a miserable life. Later on, because of Selden, Lily decides to burn the letters detailing Selden’s affair with Bertha Dorset. This might restore her former social standing but embarrass Selden. In both cases, Lily is motivated by the fact that she wants to be an individual of moral strength and self-respect (Wharton, 2008, p. 263). Lily’s choices enable her to adhere to her honor and selfhood.

Although Lily and Selden’s relationship exemplifies almost a real love, it still has some problems they have to tackle. One of them is Selden’s desire to possess her, and he is scared of a disobedient Lily. Selden decides to take her beyond— the ugliness, the pettiness, the attrition and corrosion of the soul (Wharton, 2008, p. 155). Selden imagines an attractive, wise, and pleasant woman figure that will only love and adore him by marrying her. Simon Rosedale does not develop such a loving relationship with Lily like Selden’s, but he still supports Lily’s decisions fully. Rosedale’s strategy of saving Lily is different from Selden’s. Selden asks Lily to get a divorce from the successful marriage. Rosedale agrees with this decision and develops an understanding of Lily’s situation because if she wants to live, she has to marry, and he offers her a proposal that would help both:

> Oh, if you mean you’re not dead in love with me, I’ve got sense enough left to see that. And I ain’t talking to you as if you were—I presume I know

> the kind of talk that's expected under those circumstances. I'm confoundedly gone on you—that's about the size of it—and I'm just giving you a plain business statement of the consequences. You're not very fond of me—YET—but you're fond of luxury, and style, and amusement, and of not having to worry about cash. You like to have a good time and not have to settle for it, and what I propose to do is to provide for the good time and do the settling. (Wharton, 2008, pp. 269-270)

Even though Rosedale wants Lily only because of her beauty, his continued attitude to support her by manipulating Bertha by using Selden's letters shows his deep feelings. Rosedale offers Lily everything she claims she wants and gives it to her to prove that he acknowledges her intellect rather than just her appearance, but Lily rejects him. Lily refuses his first suggestion and declines his assistance with Selden's letters, showing her dignity is above everything else.

The relationship between Lily and Gus Trenor contributes to the reader understand Lily's inner self-awareness. Lily wants money desperately; however, she does not want to let go of her dignity. Lily prefers to maintain her sense of honor by avoiding scandal and corruption despite her need for money. Indeed, as an unmarried woman in the nineteenth century in America, Lily is not going after men like other women in the book, such as Bertha Dorset. Lily is attached to Selden and has an intimate relationship with him only. While Bertha Dorset is shielded by society as long as there is no definitive proof of her adultery because she owns an impregnable bank account (Wharton, 2008, p. 396). Lily is aware that:

> There is nothing society resents so much as having given its protection to those who have not known how to profit by it: it is for having betrayed its connivance that the body social punishes the offender who is found out. (Wharton, 2008, p. 157)

Fortunately for Bertha, George Dorset seems to be oblivious to his wife's actions. According to the code, a husband is the one that decides how a woman should behave, and Bertha is quite far away from being judged as she enjoys her husband's acceptance and heedlessness. If a woman does not abide by this code, the husband can incline towards hiding the concerning matter and get away from getting a divorce and feeling embarrassed publicly. Still, with a man of George Dorset's temper, no thought of condonation could be entertained. When Bertha discovers she is on a precipice, she is unafraid to ruin both Lily and Ned Silverton to save herself (Wharton, 2008, p.158)

Wharton criticizes society's portrayal of women as pitting against each other, represented by Bertha and Lily's relationship. As Ammons (1980) points out accurately, "Without the rich man's money and favor, no woman in *The House of Mirth* could function. The system is designed to keep women in divisive and relentless competition for that money and favor" (p. 39). Bertha recognizes the power of Lily's beauty and charm. She knows that Lily could take some of her power in society. Since Bertha does not have Lily's beauty, she considers her as a threat. While Bertha manages to prevent George's divorce, she still needs to retain her reputation for being ruined by the rumors about her unfaithfulness. Bertha then says that Lily is trying to seduce her husband by blaming Lily instead of herself. Because of her wealth, Bertha exercises more influence on society; people trust the rumors about Lily. Bertha has no trouble sacrificing others to save herself, an apparent characteristic of many high society women.

Lily having no individual sovereignty, and her unmarried status is closely tied together. In the novel, married women are capital forms because they enable access to their husband's bank accounts and protect them from reputational confusion. However, Lily's situation is different; Lily lacks safe marriage when exposed to the public gaze. The reader follows Lily's growing social exploitation. First, she serves as a decoration of her host's homes; then, she can serve those newly in society as well, and finally, Lily becomes an item for sick social talk and the object of scorn for her immoral behavior. Lily's desire to have at least a small portion of liberty, and lightheartedness along with external conditions, forces Lily to withdraw from the privileged community and strive to become part of the working class.

3.3. Spiritual Liberation of Women

Many critics argue that social and economic factor in *The House of Mirth* as the cause of Lily Bart's downfall as well as a reflection of the immorality at the turn of the twentieth century. Although these ideas undoubtedly contribute to her downfall, Lily eventually succeeds in the novel by retaining her identity. Lily foregoes financial stability, and the ultimate target placed on a woman to be the ideal, desirable item, considering her upbringing to prioritize them. She also

compromises her intimate feelings of love to maintain her autonomy and individuality.

Lily wishes to be admired for her beauty but not controlled by a man as if she were a piece of art rather than a human being. Lily's objective is not to amass money, social status, or even companionship; rather, she desires to exist as an autonomous entity and social standing apart from being a commodified object of beauty. This target is impossible due to social constraints, and this is why Lily sacrifices her life with the danger of losing herself for some alternative. Lily is ripped from the ability to become actual human being with moral depth. Lily fails in this novel to consolidate the conflict between morality in being an individual and being an object, which is owned and consumed by men. Lily could not reconcile her personality with the restrained position of a middle-class female. Her seemingly random or impulsive behavior is just an attempt to achieve an elusive balance between the contradictory ideas about what it means to be happy.

Restuccia (1987) claims that "Wharton's novel conveys the feminist social message that women bred to be frilly decorations run the risks of various sorts of death" (p. 224). Wharton gives evidence to support this point by saying, "Since she had been brought up to be ornamental, she could hardly blame herself for failing to serve any practical, but the discovery put an end to her consoling sense of universal efficiency" (Wharton, 2008, p. 452). Gerty Farish avoids a fate similar to Lily because she embodies many New Woman ideologies: she lives by herself. She is committed to helping those in need instead of attending useless gatherings and meetings. She does not care about her physical appearance. However, Gerty is not the best role model for Lily due to her dislike of ugliness. Lily desires to fulfill some practical purposes (Wharton, 2008, p.452), which she believes are the impetus for her obsession with discovering and contributing to beauty. Lily desires to be beautiful, but she also desires to fulfill a purpose through her artistic endeavors. Since she is oppressed in her work life, she cannot improve herself in her profession. So, what she does instead is to be beautiful and create beauty.

Lily wants to turn herself into a piece of art in a literal and metaphoric sense, and this seems risky because she does that by reconstructing herself as an object.

Although Lily seems to be entirely aware of her actions, she claims that harnessing her beauty endows her with authority over those around her. Though she is partially right, Lily condones what her oppressive patriarchal culture desires: reducing women to mere possessions. To Mullen (2009), Lily's society is strongly attracted to her proprietary beauty, and this itself becomes her end:

> The social pressure exerted on the female characters in the novel...can be read as part of the tragedy of the novel...the novel emphasizes this ultimately fatal social concern with Lily's material wealth as opposed to her inherent human dignity (p. 46).

Lily feels she is powerful by adopting this notion of being objectified. Lily believes she is asserting her dominance. She can influence people to care for her; however, she seems to forget that she will not always be attractive to gain the upper-class position. It feels as if her price goes up and down over time, and she loses her ability to understand her real worth, thus losing her value in front of people that appreciated the beauty and the success she had once. She becomes hopeless and decides to have a beautiful death for herself. Watts (2007) argues that the fall of Lily at the end of *The House of Mirth* might be because of her lack of domestic space herself. Watts (2007) comments as follows:

> the chief appeal of The House of Mirth's fictional genre, the novel of manners, consists of the central female character's quest for domestic mastery, a narrative goal typically constructed as the struggle to conduct herself according to gendered protocol, marry a man of suitable socioeconomic status, and culminate her quest by setting up housekeeping for her family. Within these terms, a proper woman shall rule the domestic realm or die trying. As a consequence, novels of manners typically conclude in one of two ways for the central female protagonist: marital triumph or merciful death. (p. 187)

Watts concurs that Lily's inability to establish her own space, whether through marriage or work, correlates with her death eventually. She does not have a third space that she may build or control through which she fails to discover her true self. In comparison to Mrs. Peniston, Lily lacks her own space. Mrs. Peniston is innately more at ease in her space due to its aesthetic appeal. Mrs. Peniston creates a third space that she considers attractive and feels content to compliment her femininity. Lily borrows only one room inside the home, so she cannot make design choices, and her personality is diluted by the decorations decided by someone else. Lily lives together with Mrs. Peniston in the same house, and she cannot show any existence

within a room full of luxurious pieces of art. Lily tastes traditional beauty, whereas Mrs. Peniston's house is the opposite, so she finds it difficult to adjust.

During one of Lily's last moments of life, she meets Nettie Struther, who comes to symbolize everything Lily should have and everything Lily did not know she desired. Nettie rises from poverty to marry a decent man and have a child. In comparison to Lily, Nettie has a nice husband and a lovely baby. Lily spends her entire life fighting against what society demands of her, only to discover that she desires it herself, as shown by her final moments in bed hallucinating about holding Nettie Struther's son in her arms. Wharton writes in an illuminating passage,

> As she held Nettie Struther's child in her arms, the frozen currents of youth had loosed themselves and run warm in her veins: the old life-hunger possessed her, and all her being clamoured for its share of personal happiness. Yes—it was happiness she still wanted, and the glimpse she had caught of it made everything else of no account. One by one, she had detached herself from the baser possibilities, and she saw that nothing now remained to her but the emptiness of renunciation. (2008, p. 488)

In a few short pages, Wharton transforms Lily Bart from an ambitious woman trying to forge her path to a depressed innocent yearning for marriage and motherhood. Lily develops a desire for precisely what they want her demonstrating that no matter how much a woman deviates from society, she will come up against them. Society forbids her from developing an individual identity distinct from that of the ideal bourgeois feminine woman.

From *The House of Mirth*'s inception, Lily is seen through someone else's eyes, and Selden regains complete control of her narrative following her death. In the novel, Lily never achieves freedom from being seen by the eyes of others. As a result, Lily never regains complete control of her identity, as shown in the final chapter, in which Selden controls the final chapter of Lily's tale. Her demise becomes the subject of a story that is not hers. Selden can now enforce his narrative on her death and, eventually, her life based on what he observes in her tiny room. From the beginning to the end of the novel, Lily remains under the patriarchal system that creates her. Selden's concluding remarks reinforce a fact,

> He saw that all conditions of life had conspired to keep them apart; since his very detachment from the external influences which swayed her had

> increased his spiritual fastidiousness and made it more difficult for him to live and love uncritically. (Wharton, 2008, p. 501)

Selden, who stands by as Lily's life unraveled, can assert everlasting innocence because he comes to her at the end. Even in death, Lily is subjected to marriage pressure. He should convince himself that he attempts to save her through marriage while maintaining her dependency narrative. Selden completes power over his decision-making as an individual, which means his detachment is a personal choice rather than a result of the universe's will to keep Lily at bay. Thus, women are subject to determinism within a patriarchal social system, while men are subject to free will. Despite her strong will to break a stereotypical woman image's chain, Lily still has no place to go. She does not feel she belongs to any of the classes in society. As a result, she feels lonely and experiences sad death:

> Though the blind was down, the irresistible sunlight poured a tempered golden flood into the room, and in its light, Selden saw a narrow bed along the wall, and on the bed, with motionless hands and calm unrecognizing face, the semblance of Lily Bart. (Wharton, 2008, p. 495)

At the end of the novel, Lily is barely recognizable to her old friends; her beauty and elegance are gone, and just a weak body is left. However, Lily dies with a purpose, and she does not entirely fail. Rather, she triumphs in her determination to become a responsible adult by her final rejection of her empty self (Sapora, 1993, p. 20). Lily defies the constraints of her social environment by making her own choices. Letting Lily pass away at the end of the story emphasizes the value of a woman, as Kaplan (1986) points out:

> women like Lily at the turn of the century were still struggling to articulate and cope with the knowledge of their paradoxical position within an ideological terrain that was both determined by their material reality and constantly reproduced ideology of gender in which they lived. (p. 19)

We conclude that Lily and her struggles set an excellent example for women in her era, and Lily's passing away, therefore, seems insignificant compared to the fights she gives and the efforts she puts in. Wharton emphasizes how hard Lily's life is and how hard she tries to keep her high-class status. Wharton demonstrates that Lily is in a dilemma over whether to marry for money or have a free life to attain a higher-class position, but she chooses a love marriage eventually. In patriarchal societies, women have to abide by strict social rules, but Lily refuses to accept

society's demands and therefore is rejected by society. She is left with nowhere to go. She would also be incapable of surviving life outside society since she lacks the education and training necessary to live independently. Thus, with no other choices and no place in this world for her, it ends with Lily's tragic death.

CONCLUSION

This thesis aims to explain the role of gender in the two novels, *The Awakening* by Kate Chopin and *The House of Mirth* by Edith Wharton. This study utilizes the theories of Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex*. Furthermore, the gender theme in the two novels is classified and discussed–to achieve the study's objectives. A comparison will be made between the two novels, *The Awakening* and *The House of Mirth*, ; the similarities and differences between the references of gender issues in the two novels are noted. Through the progression of feminism, mainly in the last century, women have become braver to reclaim their rights and transformed their image of being weak, sacrificial, and vulnerable. Feminism demonstrates that women and men are capable of significant positions. Moreover, one of the primary aims of feminism is to provide women with complete equality before the law and equal participation in political and social activities.

The first chapter of this work involves the theoretical background, in which the definition of feminism is provided. Having emerged as a movement to struggle for gender equality, feminism has evaluated women's positions in society and advance their interests. In general terms, feminists seek to understand why women are marginalized, repressed, and oppressed while patriarchy has been praised and dominant throughout history, and they suggest morally acceptable and politically feasible alternatives to assure justice, autonomy, and equality for women. Feminism cannot be regarded as a science or philosophy; it is not a religion or ideology. Feminism is an activism to achieve gender equality to eradicate oppression, misogyny, and subordination. Besides, it should not be considered a symbol of substantial shift and transformation of social and political culture.

Feminism is a domain term that refers to issues of race, gender, class, and sexual orientation and advocates for gender equality. However, feminists commit themselves to bring about social change to abolish the injustice women confront in every aspect of life. Gender is mainly classified as boys or girls, men or women. Due to this narrow point of view, society tends to confuse the female sex with the female gender, resulting in the imposition of social limitations considering women's

behaviors and rights. Until the 1960s, gender was defined in terms of masculine or feminine. However, in contemporary meaning, gender can be described as the sex role that an individual fulfills following the social standards or expectations. One can be biologically male or female and can still be viewed as the other sex, depending on how they consider, feel and express themselves.

Simone de Beauvoir's book deals with women's social status from the beginning of civilization to the present day. Her key points can be stated as the secondary role of women in society. Beauvoir frequently stresses that women are primarily classified as the second sex and the other due to the biological differences of males and females because biology is one of the most prominent determining factors of the subordination of women in society. Beauvoir notes that women have been considered dependent on men throughout history; thus, they are often identified as inessential commodities in the relationship between men and women, while men are regarded as the essential part.

In the second chapter, will be explained the role of gender and oppression in *The Awakening* and the themes of motherhood, Marriage and Spiritual Liberation of Women. This chapter demonstrates that Edna's main struggles are due to her gender, marriage, and motherhood. However, she wants to avoid the limitations and realize herself, but once she understands that she cannot do so, she loses her will to live. In this sense, I discuss the female problems in *The Awakening* and the role of gender, considering these problems in general and in Edna's life. Chopin focuses on social class divisions and issues of gender, which result in conflicts and oppression in the struggle of a woman's existence.

The oppression of women has been widely spread in all cultures depicted in literature. Women endure this agony as the victims of pressure and oppression besides being defined as the other in a patriarchal culture, depriving them of their subjectivity and creativity. As a victim of the patriarchal world, Edna Pontellier, a young woman who questions her role in a patriarchal society, is trapped by motherhood and marriage trap restrictions. Due to the fact that women are not defined as individuals, but by their relationship with men, Edna is introduced to readers as Mrs. Pontellier instead of an individual called Edna throughout the novel.

Thus, the narrator demonstrates that the male institution rejects feminine sexual personality by denying Edna's name, which is free from all defining restrictions of patriarchy. Nevertheless, Edna rebuilds and reconstructs herself as the story unfolds, and the narrator begins addressing Edna by her name. Chopin points out that women seek their existence in all fields of life rather than being the angels of their houses, taking care of their children, and doing the housework. Domestic work, according to Beauvoir, is a sort of slavery and oppression. She argues that women are constantly engaged in low-productivity practices due to their obligation to manage home responsibilities. While domestic work perpetuates and confines women's status quo, a man has the freedom to move, progress, and be creative.

It can be concluded that Edna's husband and the higher-class Creoles are two primary sources of her oppression. Her husband Leonce is a busy upper-class businessman, and he is always preoccupied with running his own company, and he cannot pay his wife's demands any attention. Leonce believes that through his wealth, he can buy favor and substitute kindness, happiness, time, and care for his wife by buying her lavish gifts, which reflect the patterns of the behaviour of the upper class at the time. Edna is not respected in the upper-class, although she is married to a wealthy man. Because she is from the middle class, she is never viewed and accepted as she is supposed to be, and they believe that Edna does not fit in with their class standards besides not offering them any financial benefit.

The members of the upper-class assert that the middle-class of the Creole society would suit her. The creole society members view Edna as a family member and welcome her warmly to their society, and Edna retrieves her true self without being marginalized. Edna Pontellier is identified as the sole leader of her life in *The Awakening* as she searches for her freedom. Because she cannot tolerate the oppression by her husband and the upper-class Creole society, she cannot remain still and perform several liberating actions to release herself from this agony. Edna chooses to be a frontal person instead of obeying her husband's instructions and refuses to resign herself to the oppression triggered by gender inequality. Because the objectification of women causes them to lose their sense of self and isolates them, women start to view themselves as objects rather than free individuals. The product of their subjection to this masculine paradigm lacks a sense of self, which results in

women's awareness to strive against a male-dominated society to emancipate their personalities and get rid of being defined by their functions and being owned by others.

For centuries, women have found themselves imprisoned within the confines of men's expectations of femininity. In a male-dominated culture, women are only allowed to have wives as sex objects, mothers of children, and commodities. As one of the victims of such a society, Edna cannot ignore women's socially defined gender roles and gradually realizes that social acquiescence threatens her autonomy and women's identity. It can also be suggested that Edna's perspective on children shifts dramatically during the novel. Besides, Edna's belief that her struggle for autonomous selfhood entails rejecting her responsibilities as a mother leads her to describe her children as antagonistic. She starts to behave and think like a child and does not consider her husband and children. In addition, she does not always want to be with her children, prefers her loneliness, and spares time for herself instead of spending it with her kids, which would be the expectation of patriarchy.

It can be suggested that Edna reconsiders her decisions and fears about the future of her children, which may be a consequence of her irresponsibility.~~,~~ She finds herself surrounded by men: her husband and her lover. Her will to be independent is steady; however, she is worried about the possible attitudes of other people due to the choices of their mother. Edna assumes that her children will be ostracized because of her, although the fundamental goal in her life is to attain her independence. She cannot find a solution to protect her children from the possible consequences, and similarly, she cannot desist from her independence; thus, she considers that committing suicide would be more appropriate than remaining in limbo. Edna is adamant about not returning to her married life with Leonce because, with such a decision, she will forfeit the independence and liberation for which she works so hard. Moreover, she is not interested in devoting her entire life and soul to her children.

In chapter three, women's struggle for freedom discussed in *The House of Mirth* and the role of gender and oppression in *The House of Mirth*, in addition to the theme of motherhood, marriage, and Spiritual Liberation of Women. As a female author, Wharton represents the women in New York who are repressed and

marginalized by the patriarchal high society. From childhood, women are regarded as subordinate and powerless. All social standards favor men, which demonstrates women as less valuable than men besides lacking the strength, prestige, and respect men receive. In this sense, the women in the novel fight against society's patriarchal and social conventions to pursue their pleasures. Lily, the protagonist of *The House of Mirth*, lives in a patriarchal society, and she feels helpless because she cannot do anything to fulfill her dreams. She considers herself shackled, as she cannot find a way to escape from the social norms of her society. These norms also include compelling a woman to marry for financial reasons and status in society.

Lily considers the concept of marriage as a means of guaranteeing wealth and luxury. Lily's refusal of marriage directly contradicts her social norms, which are founded on male dominance. At the same time, she is a victim of the expectations of her society, struggling to conform to male and societal dominance, as well as other women in Victorian England, who are tired of men exposing their inequality and injustice. It can be noticed from the opening narration of the novel that Wharton points out gender roles through Selden, who is depicted as the observer, while Lily is regarded as an object or ornament. In Selden's perspective, Lily is a victim of the culture she grows up. Besides being restricted and called a victim, demonstrating that she has no total control over her destiny. She is not strong enough to evade her expectations because women are considered the products of the New York leisure class, which indicates that society determines what will become of them.

In *the House of Mirth*, Rosedale and Selden oppress Lily because they consider Lily an artistic work and not beautiful enough to admire. This attitude also represents the opinion of everyone in their community and prevents Lily from becoming an independent woman without marriage. To mean more than a commodity in society, Lily decides to benefit from her most important assets: attractiveness and beauty. Because Lily views her ability to exert influence over people as an art, she frequently considers herself and her appearance a manifestation of an artwork. Lily's position in society is also demonstrated in Mrs. Bry's tableaux, in which Lily is transformed into an aesthetic masterpiece. It can be stated that Lily is wholly devoted to her beauty and is thrilled with it as an artistic masterpiece. In order to express Lily's resistance to the oppression of the materialistic society, Wharton presents her as a woman who

realizes that she needs to surrender a part of herself, that is, her dignity and honor, to live a socially acceptable or financially stable life. Wharton demonstrates that losing a part of herself is worse and dangerous than death by showing Lily under challenging situations trying to take difficult decisions to save her honor and, eventually, her soul from being lost.

Wharton portrays Lily's mother, Mrs. Bart, as a woman whose primary motivation is to ensure a socially and financially stable marriage for her lovely daughter. Lily's mother exploits Lily, and she cannot imagine a life where Lily is more than just physical beauty. Lily's mother teaches her that men are providers and women are housewives and mothers. Lily assesses men at their wealth rather than their personality. She admires Selden, but he lacks the money that qualifies him as a potential marriage partner.

Lily lives in a world where marriage is the only way to keep women financially stable, which is also thought to be the source of happiness. Moreover, society provides these women only one way of financial security; thus, women link their happiness with financial safety. Under these circumstances, Lily also attempts to marry a wealthy man; however, she realizes that her suitors cannot satisfy her requirements. Therefore, she decides to marry someone who would promise both spiritual and material success. For the women in the high society, spirituality, feelings, and emotions are secondary to the amount of money men have in their pockets. In contrast to other women in her society, Lily feels alienated by her inability to be herself.

Wharton criticizes society's portrayal of women as enemies against each other, as exemplified by Bertha and Lily's relationship. Bertha realizes the beauty and allure of Lily, and she becomes aware that Lily has the potential to take possession of her power and social authority. She starts to view Lily as a threat because she lacks Lily's beauty. Thus, she needs to maintain her image in society to avoid being tarnished by the accusations about her unfaithfulness. Bertha blames Lily and tells people that Lily is trying to seduce her husband and views her behavior as a precaution and an attack to eliminate the possible risks. Bertha wields greater power in society than Lily due to her wealth; thus, people believe the stories about Lily. It

can be suggested that Bertha can sacrifice others to rescue herself, which can be considered a trait shared by many ladies of high societies.

Nevertheless, Lily succeeds in keeping her identity till the end of the novel. She rejects financial security and society's goal to make a woman more desirable. She abandons love to protect her individuality and her autonomy. Although Lily wants her beauty to be praised, she cannot be controlled by a man as though she is artwork rather than a human being. Lily wants to achieve the opportunity to lead an independent life as an individual rather than being regarded as a commodity whose interests are money, social position, and a wealthy social circle.

Wharton stresses the complicated situations and dilemmas in Lily's life while trying to keep her class status. Moreover, Lily fails to resolve the conflict between the morality of being an individual and becoming an object owned and consumed by men. Lily's failure to create her own space, whether through marriage or work to pay for an apartment, leads her to consider death the only solution. Lily loses her hope for a good life and therefore considers suicide to create a pleasant death for herself.

Wharton's heroine is usually put in the dilemma of marriage and love, which side will win; love or materialism; Lily wishes to marry for love. She refuses to accept the demands of society, showing that women are obliged to fulfill harsh social conventions in patriarchal societies. Wharton addresses the fact that women no longer want to be submissive wives and mothers, although many women could not imagine living the other way around. Similarly, Lily does not have another option except for following the way determined by society. Besides, due to her lack of education and skills, she would not live outside the society she has been living in. Under these circumstances, Lily cannot find another way to go or another chance to start a new life, which leads Lily to her tragic death.

Through examining the two novels, it can be concluded that there are differences and similarities between Edna (*The Awakening*, 1899) and Lily (*The House of Mirth*, 1905). Both women live at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, and they both struggle against the limitations that most women confront due to patriarchy. Both characters are highly aware of the oppression they are exposed to during their struggles against social norms, which causes Edna to feel lost due to her social roles as a wife and mother.

Lily seeks marriage as a means of self-preservation. Their financial stability or insecurity influences Edna and Lily's challenge of social standards. They both belong to the upper-middle-class, yet they are economically at a different level. Compared to Lily, Edna has good standards of living before and after her marriage. On the other hand, as an orphan and single woman, Lily maintains her life with the support of a wealthy but ungenerous aunt. Although both rebel against oppression, the way they act or feel in their rebellion demonstrates the role of wealth as well. Edna is free to rebel because she gets married to someone wealthy and a social climber, and she is mainly free to pursue her interests in her journey. At the same time, Lily is restricted in her struggle of becoming an individual because of financial limitations. Lily is continually burdened with general and particular expenses, making her seek to settle her debt most of her time. Lily Bart is aware of her vulnerable condition and knows that her life without wealth does not truly fit her, and she considers that she has to marry a wealthy man for a wealthy life. Besides, she has the social ability to acquire a rich man's proposal and the wealthy life he would provide for her.

However, Lily is not determined about her decisions, and every time she is about to accept a proposal, she feels guilty due to her motivation for marriage. She thinks that she can do better or does not need wealth, leading to a drawback. Nevertheless, she has the same realization—she needs luxury and money—soon after such a situation, she finds herself in the same futile cycle. In contrast to Lily, Edna Pontellier is already married with two children. She gradually becomes aware of her dissatisfaction considering the life she leads. Although her husband is a kind man but expects complete submissiveness in his marriage; thus, Edna is expected to live in the service of her children and her marriage, which she finds impossible. Her awakening is prompted by a deep passion for Robert Lebrun, who reciprocates her feelings but is initially hesitant and ultimately unwilling to act on that passion.

The descriptions of this flat are virtually identical to those of Lily's companion Gerty Farish's flat. Similar to Lily, Edna's companion Madame Reisz is a nasty pianist who lives alone in a modest apartment and leads a happy life. Both Lily and Edna take comfort in the apartments of Farish and Reisz, respectively, which may demonstrate that both characters are unable to abandon their previous, conventional

lives completely; however, they enjoy the self-reliance and authenticity of other women. On the other hand, Lily's desire for a wealthy life, which she would be able to achieve only through marriage, and Edna's desire to have a relationship with Robert demonstrate that neither Edna nor Lily is able to desist from their passions.

Considering the times when Edna and Lily live, it can be stated that both wifehood and motherhood are imposed on women, and both women are familiar with the sensation of oppression. Thus, although Edna and Lily's lives seem pretty different, they both rebel in radical ways, take risks, and neglect the consequences of their actions. For instance, Edna leaves her house and her children to get her own house. Lily, on the other hand, rejects those who want to marry her. This may be insignificant but risky for a woman of her status because it devastates her eventually. Lily gets to be harshly punished for her rebellion and is subjected to complete ostracism. Bertha Dorset blames Lily for her unhealthy relationship with her husband. Bertha thinks that Lily does this because this is the only way to cover up her intimate relationship with Ned Silverton. Once found out, Lily's social circle rejects her immediately. Lily tries to get back in the group by reintroducing herself but to no avail. For example, once they meet her for lunch, they make her feel not welcomed anymore. Although their claims are not valid, they turn her down because of her lack of wealth, husband, and status.

On the contrary, Edna receives little or no punishment for her considerably more extreme behavior, such as fleeing her home and family. Edna's behavior might be seen as less harmful compared to Lily; Edna's marriage and her husband are two factors that protect her from external pressures and incidents. Throughout her story, Lily's primary concern is to find a husband with the assumption that she would be better off and problems like money would be resolved. Lily behaves and acts just like Edna before she gets married to Leonce. Unlike Edna, though, she declines numerous suitors. She likes to have untraditional ways of marriage but somehow keeps rejecting men who make proposals for her. Lily chooses a suitor because she tries so hard to seduce men with her beauty, and once she gets their attention, they fall in love with her.

Lily's problem is not about finding suitors but accepting them. For example, she runs away from two men. One of them is a man named Gus Trenor, her

husband's friend. He wants to pay money to her at regular intervals to have a sexual relationship, but she rejects him. Another one is Simon Rosedale, who is getting rich and climbing his way up to become middle class. He also asks Lily to marry him, but she rejects him as well. The rejection of marriage as the only career conceivable for women coincides with the refusal of the established patriarchy because marriage is not viewed as a union of souls at the time but rather as a financial arrangement.

This situation can be observed in both novels and constitutes an integral part of *The House of Mirth*, in which women are forced to attach themselves to males to survive. Patriarchy is formed on the basis of marriage at the time, and men's available environment and conditions for dominating women make women economically dependent on men and force them to marry because women have no independent source of income. They are forced to rely on their husbands for everything, let men reign over them. It can be concluded that women are not at home but a part of the public sphere, previously designated for men. Their presence constitutes a significant threat and challenge considering men's dominance over women.

Edna opposes the patriarchal control over her life in *The Awakening*. This opposition demonstrates itself as marrying Leonce Pontellier despite her father's opposition and subsequently leaving her husband's home due to oppression. The fact that she continues to concentrate on her painting and her indifference for her reception day demonstrates her rebellion against the norms of society. In addition, Wharton's *The House of Mirth* critiques men's control over women, both in marriage and other areas of their social lives. However, Wharton is also aware that she possesses no authority in this world as a single, impoverished woman. Wharton exposes the reader to the harsh realities of women's existence.

In contrast to Lily, Edna seems to choose the way she would like to go. One of her choices is returning to her husband, who wants nothing more than maintaining his reputation and reuniting with his family. However, for Edna, such a decision would be conceding defeat, similar to a free bird returning to its cage. As a result of her despair, considering her possibility of happiness with Robert, Edna chooses to die and commits suicide.

Edna and Lily share the same essential goals and characteristics. The former urgently tries to break out of a socially and economically secure marriage while the latter is equally desperate to get herself into one. They both reject the traditional version of marriage and its motivations. Moreover, Edna and Lily defy tradition by not being particularly maternal, which is once considered the primary trait of a woman.

Edna, more than Lily, embraces her sexuality, which is once considered scandalous, and takes a partner, who classifies her as a fallen lady. While Lily may be more tightly committed to her values, she is also blamed for having an affair with two married men. In addition, they are both identified as prisoners of a male-dominated culture that does not allow them to be their true selves and have any kind of voice. Furthermore, Edna voluntarily and Lily unintentionally step out of the ranks of respectable high-ranking ladies and become fallen and shocked. There seems to be no such man for Lily that can support her with equal rights in marriage and social materialism; This is why she lives such impoverished and disadvantaged life until she succumbs to a disease and dies. She fails because she decides not to accede to society's pressure but because she thinks both men and women should love one another and have equal rights. However, her chance of marrying such a man is almost impossible because her options are pretty limited; she can only marry someone with upper status. She ignores typical wedding opportunities by remaining faithful to her speech on marital equality.

In contrast to Edna, Lily is aware of understanding other characters in the novel and sometimes manipulates them. Edna is not portrayed as a mother-woman figure early in *The* Awakening by her husband. However, Madame Ratignolle, Edna's companion, embodies the mother-woman ideal, which all young women should achieve. Mother-women are supposed to love their children, worship their husbands, and believe in the concept of entirely dedicating themselves to the service of another. Edna dismisses this notion, stating that she would never sacrifice herself for her children or anybody else. As a result, women are viewed as confined to house chores, and there is no opportunity of doing anything beyond the home domain. Their creativity is thus restricted to creating a new life by having children.

On the other hand, men are free in art or literature and in exploring a different form of creation in the public arena. However, the women who desire a role other than being a mother or a housewife are considered absurd. As a result, Edna attempts to establish herself as an artist in a society that does not allow women to be creative. At the end of the 19th century, women were mainly viewed as objects besides being considered the property of their fathers and husband. It can be suggested that Lily is suppressed to transform herself into an art object by the patriarchal culture in which she lives. Edna, thus, seeks to do beauty through painting, which signifies creating a piece of art, whereas Lily employs herself as a canvas. Lily's participation in the tableaux vivants at the Wellington Brys is the most evident example of this situation in *The House of Mirth*.

Lily strategically displays her attractiveness in a way that pleases everyone in attendance. The motivation for Lily's suicide is her inability to adapt to a lower-class existence. Unlike Edna's suspicious death, critics believe that Lily's death is an intentional overdose. Lily struggles tremendously to find meaning in her life following her social exile because she does not perceive her existence as beautiful. Lily decides to burn the letters that accuse Selden to avoid disgrace and retain some of her dignity and integrity. It becomes an issue of honor because it prevents both Selden from feeling embarrassed and Lily from getting corrupted. Lily does everything she can to maintain her honor, including burning the letters and paying off her obligations. Still, she becomes aware there is no way for her to have a beautiful life and understands the only way is to die beautifully.

Wharton creates a woman who strives to achieve individuality but is very strong in keeping her dignity. Wharton creates a beautiful, talented, strong woman by creating Lily, although Lily chooses to die in the end. Wharton articulates her point through Lily's suicide that every time she attempts to challenge the status quo and tries to escape, she gets closer to death. Chopin makes a similar argument about *The Awakening*, considering the situation when Edna realizes that she will never be more than property due to her affairs with men. As each woman becomes more aware of her alternatives for achieving or keeping an autonomous self, Edna starts to have less hostility towards death.

Both Edna and Lily confront the decision of killing themselves. In this sense, to these women, suicide may mean that they have struggled against oppression so fiercely and in various conditions - rich or poor, gorgeous or average, married or single – however, suicide is the only option they have. Lily's overstatement of suicide by overdose can be considered a passive act, although she desires beauty in her life and death even when she chooses to kill herself. Lily's suicide differs from Edna's because she mentions suicide before the end of the novel, implying that her final decision of overdose would not be an accident. Moreover, though Edna is described as shy and obedient at the beginning of the novel, Lily emerges as a strong-willed and intelligent figure who is acutely aware of her society and place within it. Lily is well aware of her situation, and she finds out over time that there is something different with her compared to other women.

Although Kate Chopin and Edith Wharton can have an equal life with men to be more educated and more self-sufficient, they are aware of the necessity of writing about this oppression and become the voice of other women. Chopin and Wharton write those writings to highlight their oppression and create stories demonstrating women's struggles. Besides, they convey the message that each woman's struggle against suppression is unique. Each female character in the two novels, including the minor ones, represents a distinct type of woman with painful experiences regardless of how vile the character's behavior appears. The writers illustrate critical elements of oppression and women's hardships against it. This illustration shows how powerful women are in attaining self-determination that impacts many women during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Moreover, the writers achieve this through characters representing powerful women: Edna Pontellier and Lily Bart.

Finally, we conclude that during a long period in history women are not considered equal citizens, and they endure poor treatment and sexism due to male dominance and society. Despite these obstacles, women might challenge them and demonstrate their position in society. In the past, women were exposed to unequal and unjust treatment and barred from political, social, and economic practices. Her sole occupation existed as a housewife caring for her home, husband, and children. At that time, women were subordinate to men, who dominated all fields he served as the embodiment of dominance. Following all these difficulties, pain, and suffering,

women begin to look for ways to promote their position and exist in life. Women also attempt to unite their power, hopes and wishes to create a common concept that advocates all women in all parts of the world, which results in the appearance of feminism. As the main conclusion of this study, it can be stated that the efforts made by feminists are efficient in many areas and bring about a significant improvement in women's position and function. They may eliminate the majority and give them greater relevance in society, allowing them the right to succeed in politics, society, and economic life.

In the future, researchers can conduct a study on the following research: Self Realization in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* by Anne Brontë (1848) and *The Awakening* (1899) by Kate Chopin. Feminism can be applied to these novels to investigate self-realization according to identity and the theme of marriage and motherhood. Both novels consider as broke the constraint of society in the nineteenth century. However, there are many similarities and differences between them. The protagonists of the novels, Hellen and Edna, struggle against oppression in a patriarchal society and social norms, searching for selves. Both of them are artists and escape from their husbands and fall in love with another person. The main difference between them is that Helen is more courageous than Edna because she succeeds in achieving her desire to be an independent woman and marries the man she loves. In contrast, Edna fails to face society's constraints and prefers to commit suicide. As a result, she loses everything, her life, her children, and her husband.

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