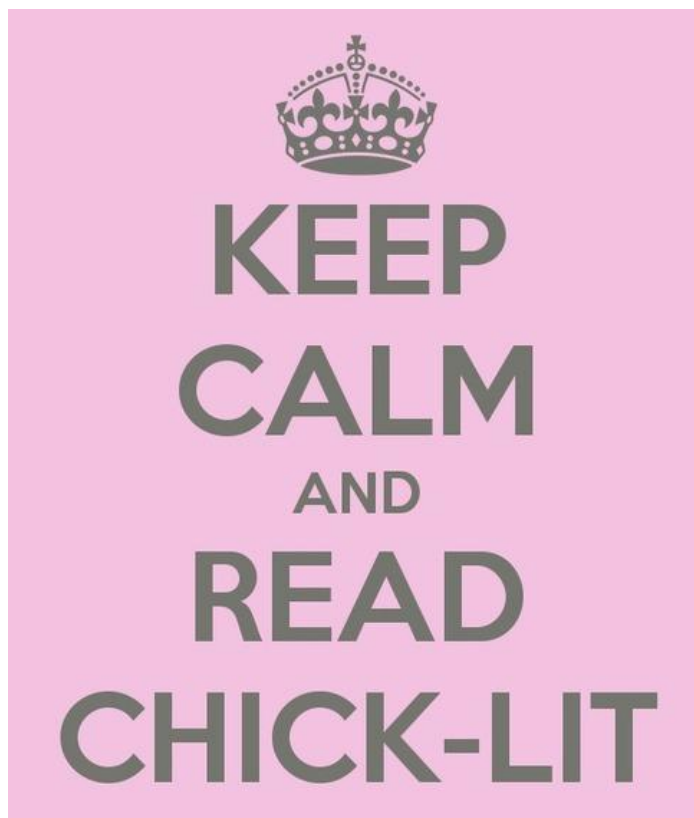


Tension in the Margins:

The Influence of Postfeminism on  
Objectification, Gender Relations, and Career  
Opportunities in Chick-lit Novels



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### Samenvatting

Deze scriptie onderzoekt hoe de spanningen tussen de “conservative backlash” en de “girl power” beweging invloed hebben op de concepten objectificatie, gender relaties en carrière mogelijkheden in chick-lit romans. De conservative backlash en girl power zijn beide definities die horen bij postfeminisme waar bij de backlash een achteruitgang in de behandeling van vrouwen betekent, voornamelijk op het gebied van gelijkheid, en girl power een nieuwe draai geeft aan de ideeën van de tweede golf van het feminisme. Er is voor dit onderwerp gekozen, omdat er nog vrij weinig onderzoek gedaan is naar chick-lit romans, maar deze wel interessante informatie kunnen opleveren over het beeld van de vrouw. Om de invloed van het postfeminisme op de gekozen concepten te analyseren is gekozen om romans van drie auteurs te bestuderen. Deze auteurs zijn Rachel Gibson, Marian Keyes en Sophie Kinsella en van elk van deze auteurs zijn drie boeken gebruikt. Alle thema's kunnen in principe onderverdeeld worden in twee delen: de invloed van het postfeminisme op de werkvloer en de invloed op het privéleven. Hieruit blijkt dat men zich in de privésfeer aardig heeft ontwikkeld en dat daar een redelijke mate van gelijkheid tussen man en vrouw heerst terwijl er op de werkvloer nog altijd veel verdeeldheid heerst.

Steekwoorden: chick-lit, postfeminism, objectification, gender relations, career, Rachel Gibson, Marian Keyes, Sophie Kinsella.

## Introduction

In less than a second, she'd been found lacking and dismissed. But she was used to it. Men like Luc usually didn't pay much attention to women like Jane. Barely an inch over five feet, with dark brown hair, green eyes, and an A-cup. They didn't stick around to hear if she had anything interesting to say. (Gibson, *See Jane Score* 7)

Caroline worked at Nordstrom's selling her favorite addiction – shoes. In appearance, she and Jane were on opposite ends of the spectrum. She was tall, blond, and blue-eyed, a walking advertisement of beauty and good taste. And their temperaments weren't much closer. Jane was introverted, while Caroline didn't have a thought or emotion that wasn't expressed. (Gibson, *See Jane Score* 27)

Despite its popularity, the chick-lit novel is an underestimated area of research. The genre is often dismissed because of its image as trashy fiction. However, research could give more insights into the reasons of the genre's popularity, its development over the years, and the portrayal of twenty-first century women in chick-lit. The excerpts above are examples of the portrayal of objectification, more specifically the stereotyping of female beauty. This thesis analyses objectification, gender relations, and career in relation to postfeminism with the aim of answering the main question: How does the tension between conservative 'backlash' and 'girl power' shape the representation of objectification, gender relations, and career in post-2000 chick lit novels by Rachel Gibson, Marian Keyes, and Sophie Kinsella?

The use of postfeminist theory helps to clarify the tension of the position of twenty-first-century women in society. The Longman Dictionary of English Language and Culture defines postfeminist as follows: "developing from and including the ideas and beliefs of feminism (= a movement supporting equality for women)". However, former research on the subject concludes that the postfeminist movement, which came into being at the end of the twentieth century, is not as straightforward as the name and definition might suggest. The difficulties are caused by two different things. First of all, the prefix 'post' is the basis for some interpretation problems because to some people it suggests that feminism no longer exists. However, this thesis assumes that postfeminism represents a movement which is no longer part of second wave feminism (Genz, Brabon 3). As Genz and Brabon write "[Postfeminism] is neither a simple rebirth of feminism nor a straightforward abortion but a complex resignification that harbours within itself the threat of backlash as well as potential

for innovation” (8). The concept combines feminism with social, cultural, political and theoretical angles which together form a coherent view of women’s position in society and the changes that these position made throughout the years (6).

The other problem is the wide variety of definitions. In general a distinction is made between three or four categories: conservative backlash, girl power, third wave feminism, and postmodern/structuralist feminism (1). Girl Power is an optional category, which is not acknowledged by all researchers, Chris Holmlund, for example, does not mention it (156).

A short overview of each category is given to provide some insight. The conservative backlash is a “pessimistic position that equates postfeminism with anti-feminist and media-driven backlash characterised by a rejection of feminist goals and an attempt to turn the clock back to pre-feminist” (Genz, Brabon 51). An important concept related to backlash is fear for relapse, which is not an unrealistic idea since research has proven that an era in which female conditions improved is followed by a backlash (52). An excellent example is the second wave of feminism. After the second wave, women became unhappy because they were unable to combine their careers and family lives. Critics blamed the women themselves for their unhappiness and suggested that they gave up their careers (55). Holmlund calls the backlash, chick postfeminism, a group which takes the goals of second-wavers for granted and/or is hostile against them (116).

Girl power partly overlaps with backlash, which is probably the reason Holmlund did not make a separate category of it. Genz and Brabon state that the girl power movement “contains an implicit rejection of many tenets held by second wave feminists – who stressed the disempowering and oppressive aspects of femininity in a male-dominated society” (76). The movement is characterised by female independence, individuality, and display of sexuality. In contrast with second-wavers these women do not mind to present themselves as sexual objects (77).

The third category, third wave feminism, emerged in the 1990s and “can be understood in terms of a conservative/patriarchal discourse that seeks to criticise and undermine second wave feminism” (156). The movement uses second wave as a starting point, but is less strict in its definition of female identity. Holmlund identifies this group as “grrrls” and has a similar definition.

The last definition that both Genz, Brabon and Holmlund give to postfeminism is postmodern postfeminism in which “the subject in the theory is always surrounded by power structures and discursive formations” (107).

In research on postfeminism, either in relation to chick-lit or not, researchers often do not make the distinction between the different definitions of the term and assume that readers understand and agree with their view on the concept, which often tends to be something in the middle of conservative backlash and third wave. Furthermore, Helen Fielding's *Bridget Jones's Diary*, which was published in 1996, is more than once used as the primary example, while many other chick-lit novels have been published ever since. Chick-lit is usually mentioned in relation to the girl power movement, but could also be researched from an anti-feminist or third-wave perspective to analyse if and how the tension between the different movements is present in the novels.

### **What is Chick-Lit?**

Chick-lit is short for "chick literature" (Genz, Brabon 84) and aims for a twenty to thirty year old female audience. Nowadays, the genre is connected with "fun pastel-covered novel[s] with a young city-based protagonist, who has a kooky best friend, an evil boss, romantic troubles and a desire to find the One – the apparently unavailable man who is good-looking, can cook and is both passionate and considerate in bed" (Genz, Brabon 84). However, the term was first used by Cris Mazza and Jeffrey DeShell editors of *Chick Lit: Postfeminist Fiction*, which was published in 1995. The anthology was a collection of works by female authors with a more experimental style (Frangello). They choose the title for its ironic feel; to take responsibility for the fact that the female stereotype was kept alive by the anthology they compiled. What they did not expect was that their rather sarcastic title would change into the name of one of the fastest growing literary genres.

This change started with the publication of *Bridget Jones's Diary* by Helen Fielding and was fully developed about 10 years later (Ferris 18). The publication of Fielding's novel was the beginning of the development of a "female-oriented form of fiction", a genre that gained immediate success (Genz, Brabon 84). The genre's popularity can merely be ascribed to the identifiable topics that are always discussed in the same style, which was introduced by Fielding and adopted by many other authors (85). Over the years not only the genre developed, but also several subgenres came into existence.

Like every genre chick-lit does not only have admirers, but also a great number of critics, who more than once describe the genre as trash (Ferris, Young 1). Critics usually explain their disgust towards the genre in two manners. First of all, they describe chick-lit novels as modern rewritings of romances, which focus on a love story with a happy ending (Genz, Brabon 85). This assumption inspired researchers to compare Harlequin and Mills and

Boon romances with chick-lit novels (Ferris, Young 3). The traditional romances reached their highest point in the 1970s as a counteraction to the second wave of feminism, while the chick-lit novel emerged in the 1990s and had its counterpart in postfeminism (37). Where critics claim that chick-lit is also just about the quest for love, supporters claim the opposite and state that the genre focuses on struggles of everyday life (Genz, Brabon 86). Although there are several similarities between traditional romances and chick-lit, research (amongst others by Genz and Brabon) has proven that chick-lit is far more realistic and identifiable than the search for love in Harlequin and Mills and Boon novels.

Furthermore, critics claim chick-lit is anti-feminist because it fails to move out of the heroines personal environment and does not relate problems of inequality to a broader, political, setting (87). There are not only critics of the genre, but also supporters who claim and state that chick-lit presents a believable view of young women and their struggles in modern society (Ferris 9). According to Juliette Wells the chick-lit novel should not be criticised and compared with other genres as much and just be seen as the next generation of women's writing. This does not mean it is the new women's literature because that term is left for novels and authors that are considered to be high literature, which is the opposite of popular culture, such as chick-lit (49).

### **Research question and theoretical framework**

The aim of this thesis is to determine how objectification, gender relations, and career possibilities are represented in relation to the postfeminist movements of conservative backlash and girl power in post-2000 chick-lit novels. As mentioned before, the material used for this consists of nine novels by three different authors. Due to the scope of this research it is impossible to take into account the complete oeuvres of these authors or more than three authors.

To answer the main question the themes objectification, gender relations, and career are discussed in the light of postfeminist ideas. A chapter is dedicated to each of these themes. Each chapter starts with a general introduction to the theme and introduces its relation with postfeminism. After this introduction an analysis of the novels related to the themes is presented. Each chapter ends with a conclusion. As it is impossible to go into depth when each chapter discusses nine novels, each chapter only contains four or five representatives for its analyses.

The ideas of second-wave-feminists help to indicate whether actions and events in the novels are part of the conservative backlash or of the girl power movement. A theme of main

importance, which will be discussed in the first chapter of this thesis, in postfeminist theory is objectification, which is to be found profusely in chick-lit novels. In short, objectification means to treat a person, usually a woman, as an object instead of as a human being. The term objectification is an umbrella term and covers the components beauty, love, and sex. One of the largest subjects within objectification is female sexuality and that is why the main focus will be on this while discussing objectification in the novels. The other elements are not completely omitted, but are less relevant in relation to chick-lit novels. The main questions of this chapter, whether women are objectified, and if so how they are objectified and what the results of this are, are answered according to a list of ten aspects that make a person into an object is used. This list consists of instrumentality, denial of autonomy, inertness, fungibility, violability, ownership, denial of subjectivity, reduction of body, reduction of appearance, and silencing (Nussbaum 225-229). All of these aspects, which are not all of the same importance, are discussed in further detail in the following chapter. A general comment that can be made is that objectification has negative connotations and that if women are portrayed as objects in chick-lit novels this should be considered to be part of the backlash. However, Sally Haslanger and Nancy Tuana state that this negativity should be nuanced because there are some positive sights to objectification as well. An analysis of the novel has to indicate whether this is possible or not, but the fact that the protagonists in chick-lit novels take control over their own sexuality might imply there are some positive aspects to objectification. Rochelle Mabry supplements this by stating that is more acceptable for women to have a voice with which they bring across their own desires (192). However, it is still a male-dominated world in which women are more than once portrayed in a conservative manner (205).

In the second chapter gender relations in chick-lit novels are discussed. Gender relations is a concept “suitable for critically investigating the structural role that genders play in social relations in their totality” (Haug 279). The problem with the concept is that there is no uniform concept with certain ideas attached to it to discuss gender relations in whatever context. With the use of a theory by Judith Gerson and Kathy Peiss this chapter tries to answer the question if male to female relations and female to female relations, and if so in what way? Furthermore, it focuses on the ratio of male and female characters, and the target group of chick-lit novels. Gender is a system of social relations and the concepts boundaries, interaction between negotiation and domination, and consciousness together form a rather complete image of what gender relations imply and how they work. These relations are then discussed from a postfeminist view, which again has two sides to it. For second wave



feminists the ideal situation would be a society in which men and women have equal rights and gain an equal amount of respect (Haslanger, Tuana). When this is translated to postfeminism it suggests that novels in which the woman is a man's minor or does not gain the same amount of respect can be seen as anti-feminist, also known as the backlash movement in this thesis. Another option is that differences between men and women are less relevant for third-wave feminists, which would mean that male domination is not necessarily a bad thing.

The third, and last, chapter deals with the protagonists' careers as these, like the former two topics, give interesting insights related to the tensions between the different definitions of postfeminism. The focus is on two questions: what kind of professions do the protagonists have? And what influence does the family model have on men's approach towards women in leading positions? The first question is discussed in relation to the background of the authors and Juliette Wells idea that all women in chick-lit novels have a job, but not all of them have a career. This means that although they all work it is not always at the intellectual level that fits their abilities and/or their aspirations. Richard Curtis and Patricia MacCorquodale's theory about family models is the basis to discuss in which manner men act towards women in leading positions. The theory implies that men tend to compare women at work with female family members and base their acceptance of authority on these family relations. Independence and providing for oneself is an item of importance for second wave feminists. In that respect housework is seen as oppressive because it is unpaid and makes women dependent on men (Ferguson). As most women have a job this is seen as a positive thing. However, these careers are mostly in the same sector and not in top-positions, which makes it less progressive as it seems at first hand.

The conclusive chapter combines the results from the chapters on objectification, gender relations, and career possibilities to determine how these topics are shaped by the tension between conservative backlash and girl power. The most obvious result is that the topics are approached from both sides in the novels and that no decisive answer can be given on whether chick-lit is part of the conservative backlash or of the girl power movement. In other words, in some cases chick-lit novels tend to lean towards the anti-feminist side of postfeminism, while simultaneously, they are very progressive.

### **Who are the authors?**

In this thesis a total of nine novels by three authors are analysed. These authors are Rachel Gibson, Marian Keyes, and Sophie Kinsella. The first is chosen because she is not as well-

known as the other two, at least not in Europe, and to get a complete view it is useful to compare more popular authors with less-known authors. Kinsella in this perspective is chosen because of her immense popularity. Keyes, who is sometimes seen as the mother of chick-lit and has a wide range of readers, completes the trio because of her special approach. Although they are based in different countries, all three are born and raised in an English-speaking culture. Furthermore, they are from the same generation and have a similar class background including higher education. Last but not least, they have the same types of hobbies which in itself match with the hobbies of their novels' protagonists. The combination and comparison of these three authors makes it possible to give a general view of their place in the chick-lit genre. On the basis of three authors and a limited part of their oeuvre it is impossible to give conclusive answers to the questions on the genre as a whole.

#### *Sophie Kinsella:*

Sophie Kinsella, pen name for Madeleine Wickham, was born on 12 December 1969. She spent her childhood in London. She studied Politics, Philosophy and Economics at New College in Oxford. After graduating she got a job as financial journalist. At the age of twenty-four her first novel, *The Tennis Party*, was published under her real name. The novel was praised by critics as well as by readers. She published six more novels under this name and soon became a full-time writer. In the year 2000, she published her first Sophie Kinsella novel, namely *The Secret Dreamworld of a Shopaholic*, which is the first in a sequence that consists of seven novels at the moment. After the publication of her first novel she became quickly one of the most popular and beloved chick-lit authors of the last fifteen years. All her novels reached the bestseller status in the United Kingdom, the United States, and many other countries. In addition to the Shopaholic-series, she has written six standalone novels of which the following three are discussed in this thesis: *Can You Keep a Secret*, *Remember Me*, and *Wedding Night*. She currently lives with her husband and children in London (Sophie's World).

#### *Marian Keyes:*

Marian Keyes was born in Limerick, Ireland and was raised in Cavan, Cork, Galway and Dublin. She spent most of her twenties in London where she met her husband. Before she started writing chick-lit novels she studied Law and Accountancy because she did not believe she could be an author. After an alcohol addiction and an attempt of suicide she wrote her first short story, "Out of the Blue" in 1993. This story was the beginning of her writing career and

resulted in the publication of *Watermelon* in 1995. *Watermelon* became an immediate success in Ireland and after it received the title Fresh Talent book her fame spread over the world. Currently her bibliography consists of thirteen novels, which discuss everyday-life problems. In addition to these novels she also writes short stories and articles. The following three novels are used in this thesis: *The Other Side of the Story*, *Anybody Out There*, and *The Woman who Stole my Life*. Currently she lives with her husband in Dún Laoghaire (About Marian/Eleven Things About Marian).

*Rachel Gibson:*

Rachel Gibson is especially popular in the United States, where she is a bestselling-author. She was born and raised in Boise, Idaho, where she still lives. Her first novel, *Simply Irresistible*, was published in 1998. Since then she wrote 23 more novels of which the following three are discussed in this thesis: *See Jane Score*, *Run to You*, and *I'm In No Mood for Love* (About Rachel).

### The Power of Beauty

Carmello twiddled a length of my hair around her finger and considered my reflection in the mirror. ‘You’ve great hair,’ she said. ‘Thank you.’ ‘With a proper cut, it could be really something.’ (Keyes, *The Woman Who Stole My Life* 399)

My pink retro *toaster*? ‘You used to come here and eat toast.’ Jon follows my astonished gaze. ‘You used to cram it in like you were starving.’ I’m suddenly seeing the other side of me; the side I thought had disappeared for ever. (Kinsella, *Remember Me* 383)

As A. Mabry states in her essay “About a Girl: Female Subjectivity and Sexuality in Contemporary ‘Chick’ Culture,” many contemporary and popular forms of media still depict women of all ages in a conservative manner. However, certain developments are taking place in the novel and film industry. Chick-lit novels and chick-flicks, films which are basically chick-lit on screen, offer more than the standard love story. Like the more traditional romances they aim for a female audience, but in addition to this they “examine women’s experiences and desires” (192). According to Mabry one of these desires is to discover one’s own sexuality and the possibilities this offers women in their life.

As the excerpts above might indicate, this chapter’s focus is objectification. Objectification encloses several subcategories of which some are of main importance in chick-lit novels. One of these components is beauty. Evangelia Papadaki claims that “in order to gain social acceptability, women are under constant pressure to correct their bodies and appearance more generally, and make them conform to the ideals of feminine appearance of their time, the so-called ‘norms of feminine appearance’” (Papadaki). In practical terms this means that the woman in the excerpt by Keyes’ novel *The Woman Who Stole My Life* does not conform to this ideal because of her hair. In her eyes nothing is wrong with it, but outsiders make her aware of it in a criticising way. The woman in the excerpt from *Remember Me* by Kinsella on the other hand meets the criteria of the norms of feminine appearance, but for the sake of it has to give up eating carbohydrates, which is an impossible task for her. Two other main elements of importance relating to objectification are love and sex. In general the main focus of this chapter is on female sexuality within the concept of objectification.

As mentioned before, the components beauty, love, and sex are all part of the larger, covering concept objectification. The Longman Dictionary Online defines the concept as

follows: “to treat a person or idea as a physical object” (Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English). Calogero in his article “Objectification Theory: An Introduction” notes that both men and women can be, and are objectified, but in Western societies women are more vulnerable for objectification than their counterparts (4). Therefore, it seems logical that the phenomenon is a key element of feminist theories (Papadaki). The main focus of this chapter is based on the theory behind objectification. First, it explains what objectification implies, then it discusses whether or not the women in chick-lit novels are objectified, and in the conclusion it links the result to postfeminist ideas.

## Objectification

Langton, in his work *Sexual Solipsism: Philosophical Essays on Pornography and Objectification*, states that the term objectification was used in philosophy long before feminists started using it (223). Although the concept was named objectification much later, Aristotle was the first to mention the main idea behind it. He claimed that a human being should never be used as “a living tool” (Langton 223). He made this statement in relation to slavery and, thus, claimed that a slave should not be treated as an object. Many centuries later, Immanuel Kant picked up on Aristotle’s idea and developed it further. Langton states that “For Kant, moral wrong-doing consists in a failure to treat humanity ‘always as an end and never as a means only’ – a failure to respect that humanity ‘by virtue of [which] we are not for sale at any price’” (223). Kant defines humanity as “an individual’s rational nature and capacity for rational choice” (Papadaki). Beings with humanity, which are humans only, should be able to decide for themselves what is of importance in life and how this can be realised. However, it is important that all humans respect the humanity of others as much as they respect their own humanity (Papadaki). While Kant focused on objectification as all wrong-doing, feminist thinkers focus merely on female objectification, which they link to oppression. They claim that the oppression of women partly exists because of the objectification of women (Langton 228,223). They state that like slaves, “women have been treated as beings whose nature is to be directed by another, and whose purpose is instrumental” (241).

Martha Nussbaum, a philosopher with a great interest in feminism, in her book *Sex and Social Justice*, published in 1999, combined Kant’s ideas with feminist theories on objectification. This combination resulted in a list of seven features which together form an explanation of objectification. Each of the seven aspects is a way to make someone into an object. The first feature, “instrumentality”, is one of the most important aspects on the list and

can also be found in Kant's ideas on objectification. Nussbaum defined instrumentality as follows: "the objectifier treats the object as a tool of his or her purposes" (Nussbaum 218). The second item on the list is "denial of autonomy", which means that "the objectifier treats the object as lacking in autonomy and self-determination" (218). According to Langton this feature, together with instrumentality, is the essence of Nussbaum's point. The third point mentioned is "inertness", meaning "the objectifier treats the object as lacking in agency, and perhaps also in activity" (218). This feature is followed by "fungibility", which implies that "the objectifier treats the object as interchangeable (a) with other objects of the same type and/or (b) with objects of other types" (218) "Violability" means that "the objectifier treats the object as lacking in boundary integrity, as something that it is permissible to break up, smash, break into" (218). Furthermore, "ownership" meaning that "the objectifier treats the object as something that is owned by another, can be bought or sold, etc" (218). The last aspect on Nussbaum's list is "denial of subjectivity," with the definition "the objectifier treats the object as something whose experiences and feelings (if any) need not be taken into account" (218).

Although Langton notes that Nussbaum's research contains valuable information, he also states that her theory is not complete. Nussbaum's clarification focuses on the role of the object. In this explanation Langton misses the definition of the "treating as," which is to be found in all the definitions which are part of the seven features of objectification (Langton 226). Langton, furthermore, claims that Nussbaum's idea that "autonomy-denial and instrumentality are mutually entailing: one treats an adult human being as mere means if and only if one denies their autonomy" (227) is too straightforward. He ends with a more positive note by adding three features to Nussbaum's list. The first of these is "'reduction to body': one treats it as identified with its body, or body parts" (228). Another one is "reduction to appearance" which means that "one treats it primarily in terms of how it looks, or how it appears to the senses" (229). The last one "silencing" is defined as "one treats it as silent, lacking the capacity to speak" (229).

As mentioned before, not all features of objectification are equally important and some of them seem hard to understand for everyone without detailed knowledge on the subject. And even though Langton and others have questioned the palpability and usability of Nussbaum's list a couple of these items are used to analyse the novels of this thesis. While all features are discussed more attention is paid to some of them because they suit the chick-lit genre better than others. This means that the focus is merely on the aspects added by Langton because these are more closely connected to female sexuality than Nussbaum's features. After

the analysis of the novels it will also be possible to determine whether or not instrumentality and denial of autonomy are as important as Nussbaum claims them to be.

So far, this chapter has discussed the genesis of the term objectification, and an umbrella concept which explains the things that are considered to be objectification. This paragraph aims to explain how objectification works. Langton describes objectification as “a process in which the social world comes to be shaped by perception, desire, and belief” (282). In other words, a good amount of the male population in western societies sees women as the subordinate sex. Only this belief already makes that women become subordinate to men (282). This is caused by the fact that men start to treat women in the way they see them; as objects. This treatment in itself is not enough, but the addition of things that “men say to and about women” make women subordinate (283). The subordinate position implies inequality between men and women, which makes men feel more powerful and able to objectify women. In the eyes of Mackinnon and Dworkin, pornography is to blame for the way men see women. The problem with pornography is that it explicitly portrays women as sexual objects. Moreover, it teaches men, but also women, that a woman’s main purpose is to be used by men (Papadaki). Nussbaum argues that pornography, although it is a factor of influence, is not the main cause of objectification. She states that social inequality is the blame for everything (Papadaki). So where Mackinnon and Dworkin see pornography as a medium that creates social inequality, which then in itself causes objectification, Nussbaum argues the opposite. In her opinion social inequality already exists and is strengthened by pornography. It seems that Nussbaum’s point is more valid because social inequality already existed before pornography. Following Mackinnon and Dworkin’s argumentation there would be no inequality or objectification without pornography, which is highly unlikely.

The objectification of women has massive influence on women and influences them in several ways. According to Calogero the effects of objectification of women, especially sexual objectification, are more than once ignored (7). However, objectification can lead to self-objectification. If women are exposed to objectifying experiences in their day-to-day life they might start to see themselves as objects. They start to look at themselves from the point of view of an outsider and begin to take control over this view (7). The problem is that the beauty ideal of the twenty-first century is unrealistic and women feel obliged to change their bodies all the time to match an unachievable ideal (9). However, the main problem is not self-objectification but the psychological consequences it has. These consequences are shame for the body, anxiety related to appearance and safety, lack of concentration related to mental and physical tasks, and decreased awareness of internal and bodily states. These consequences in

itself tend to lead to higher risks of mental health risks as eating disorders, unipolar depression, and sexual dysfunctions (11). Research has proven that self-objectification can be avoided by using inspirational terms instead of objectifying ones. Words like weight have a negative connotation and increase the negative self-images of women, while words as fitness are less harming and tend not to lead to self-objectification (90).

To conclude this theoretical frame of objectification, it is important to note that some critics share the thought that objectification is not always a negative thing. Nussbaum believes that it can have positive aspects in situations in which a man and a woman, or for that matter two people, are completely equal. This equality and respect for each other makes it possible to (sexually) objectify one another without any negative connotations (Papadaki). Furthermore, it seems that the new generation of feminists, third-wavers, no longer believe sexualisation self-evidently has an oppressive effect on women. Although it is often used by men to keep their power over women in society, sexualisation can also have positive effects. The expression of sexuality by women should be seen as empowering, if they do this for themselves: “Third-wave feminists believe that any choice made by women is positive.” This, however, does not mean that they approve objectification, they only argue that there is no harm done in expressing your own sexuality (Smolak 57). In the next section, situations in the novels that seem to contain objectification are discussed in the light of the items on Nussbaum’s list and the additions Langton made to it. In this analysis the idea that objectification is not merely a negative concept is kept in mind.

### **Objectification in the Novels**

The following part analyses the novels by Gibson, Keyes, and Kinsella to indicate whether or not women in the researched novels, which give an indication of whether chick-lit novels, are objectified by men. As mentioned in the introduction it is impossible to discuss all relevant parts of each novel and therefore is chosen to discuss abstracts from the following four novels: *Remember Me*, *Can You Keep A Secret?*, *The Woman Who Stole My Life*, and *See Jane Score*. Each section discusses a maximum of three of the most relevant quotes to explain if and how that particular concept can be found in chick-lit novels.

#### *Instrumentality:*

The concept instrumentality assumes that the “objectifier treats the object as a tool of his or her purposes” (Nussbaum 257).



‘That reminds me. Before I shoot off, there’s one thing I left for you to deal with as director of the department. I thought it only right.’ At last. He’s treating me like the boss. ‘Oh yes?’ I lift my chin. ‘What is it?’ ‘We’ve had an email from on high about people abusing lunch hours.’ He reaches into his pocket and produces a piece of paper. ‘SJ wants all directors to give their teams a bollocking. Today, preferably.’ Byron raises his eyebrows innocently. ‘Can I leave that one to you?’ (Kinsella, *Remember Me* 251)

Although the concept is a difficult one, the excerpt above indicates that chick-lit does contain cases of instrumentality. The difficulty of the concept is formed by two things. First of all, it is hard to distinguish it from the other items on the list of objectification. Furthermore, it is hard to decide whether the objectifier really uses someone for his or her purposes.

In the passage above Byron treats Lexi as a tool for his own purposes. In this case she is treated as messenger. Even though he himself could bring the message across to the department, he makes Lexi do it. This would be logical and maybe even acceptable if he was Lexi’s superior, but the opposite is the case. Lexi is his superior and it is unacceptable for someone in his position to give her orders. He does not want to bring the bad news because he does not want his colleagues to blame him, and also he because he does not like Lexi. Therefore, he makes Lexi, who has just recovered from a car accident, do it. Although a messenger is not necessarily a tool because of its human appearance, in this case it seems to fit the description. The main reason for this is that Byron does not want Lexi to do anything because she is suffering from memory loss, but as he has his eyes on her position he will not let a chance go by that will benefit him and disadvantage her.

Another example of instrumentality can be found in Kinsella’s *Can You Keep A Secret?*

‘So what’s your target market this time?’ asks the man, consulting his notes. ‘Are you aiming at sportswomen?’ ‘Not at all,’ says Jack. ‘We’re aiming...the girl on the street.’ . . . ‘Can a company like Panther – can a man like you – really tap into the psyche of, as you put it, an ordinary, nothing-special girl?’ ‘Yes, I can!’ . . . ‘I know who this girl is,’ says Jack. ‘I know what her tastes are; what colours she likes. I know what she eats, I know what she drinks. I know what she wants out of life.’ (Kinsella, *Can You Keep A Secret?* 258)

The girl Jack described in this passage is Emma, one of the company’s employees. The information Jack has is based on secrets Emma shared with him by accident. They were on a plane, which she believed was about to crash, and she was unaware that Jack was the

managing director of the company she works for. During their developing relationship he got to get to know her even better. Eventually he uses everything he has learnt about Emma to describe the target group of the company's new drink. Although her colleagues recognise her in the description for the outside world she is turned into an object. Jack used her as an example to promote something, in other words he treats her as a tool for promotion activities. The excerpts mentioned were two of the clearest examples of instrumentality in the novels chosen for this chapter.

*Denial of autonomy:*

The next feature, denial of autonomy, which according to Nussbaum means that "an objectifier treats an object as lacking in autonomy and self-determination" (257). According to Langton this concept is a crucial idea on Nussbaum's list since it encloses some of the other aspects (Langton 227). Several examples in which the protagonist is denied autonomy can be found in chick-lit novels:

She produced a sheaf of paper from her bag which I guessed was a printout of my book and she waved it about. 'We could go a long ways with this. Drop ten pounds and you've got yourself an agent.' 'What?!' 'Yeah, we need you a little thinner to make you promotable. TV adds ten pounds and all that blah.' 'But –' 'Details, details.' . . . I didn't like the direction this was going in. (Keyes, *The Woman Who Stole My Life* 361).

As soon as Stella shows interest in a contract with this literary agent she loses control over her own life. The excerpt above shows a clear example regarding Stella's weight. Her agent does not only take control over her weight, but also over her general looks and her career. On her agent's advice Stella moves to New York to start her 'big career'. In the remaining part of the novel Stella has to go on a book tour because her agent and publisher want this. She is not happy about this at all, but cannot do anything than agree with it because otherwise her book deal will be ended. Nevertheless, as the tour fails, because of lack of interest by the audience, she loses agent and later also her deal with her publisher.

The passage below indicates Lexi's struggle with autonomy and self-determination. Her husband made her a manual of her life because of her memory loss. It should help her to pick up her life were she left before the accident and in this manner bring back her memory. However, by presenting this manual to her it seems as if the opportunity to explore everything on her own is taken away. It is especially hard because in her head she is still the woman of three years earlier with completely different views on life. Before she became a successful

businesswoman with matching lifestyle she was not obsessed with beauty and her job. Everything that seems important to the ‘new’ Lexi is in contrast with the things the ‘old’ Lexi liked. Her amnesia makes her remember her ‘old’ habits, which she likes and wants to return to, but the manual, along with the people close to her, try to force another view on her.

*Eric and Lexi Gardiner: Marriage Manual.* ‘You remember the doctor suggested writing down all the details of our life together?’ Eric looks proud. ‘Well, I’ve compiled this booklet for you. Any question you have about our marriage and life together, the answer should be in there.’ (Kinsella, *Can You Keep A Secret?* 130)

So, although chick-lit protagonists usually are not denied their autonomy over their own lives in some cases they are treated as objects without autonomy.

#### *Inertness:*

The idea behind inertness, “the objectifier treats the object as lacking in agency, and perhaps also in activity” (Nussbaum 257), is not as important as the concept denial of autonomy. In contrast with the other concepts no real examples of inertness can be found in any of the novels. Even though the protagonists Stella and Emma of *The Woman Who Stole My Life* and *Can You Keep A Secret?* are accused of lacking initiative or not working hard enough as opposed to others, they are not actually treated as objects without any agency or activity. It can, thus, be said that inertness is not a useful concept to analyse objectification in chick-lit novels.

#### *Fungibility:*

‘So here it is in plain English: there will be no second book for you. It’s over, Stella.’ ‘... And you’re going to publish Gilda’s book?’ I asked. ‘Without me?’ ‘That’s it. We’ve been watching Gilda for a while; we love her work on your blog and twitter.’ . . . ‘So I don’t have a book deal any longer?’ I asked. ‘No,’ Gilda said. ‘And you do? But how is this going to work?’ I sounded almost slurred. ‘Who’s your agent?’ She shrugged, as if she couldn’t believe my stupidity. ‘Mannix.’ (Keyes, *The Woman Who Stole My Life* 490-491)

The quote above is the perfect example of fungibility, which implies that “an object is interchangeable for another object” (Nussbaum 257). It indicates Stella’s struggle that came into existence through pressure of her having to produce a second book. As her first novel did not break the records, which her literary agent expected, it is hard to find a publisher for her

second novel. Therefore, she starts a collaboration with Gilda, but when it comes to the actual contract Stella is replaced by Gilda by the publishing company. The situation is entangled as Gilda names Mannix, who maintains to be Stella's boyfriend, as her agent. On professional level Stella is interchanged with an object, Gilda, of another type. Gilda is younger, prettier copy who fits the picture better. However, this is the only situation in the novels that can be placed under the concept fungibility. A careful conclusion should therefore be that fungibility is only occasionally visible and thus not so relevant.

### *Violability:*

Violability is related to "lacking in boundary-integrity," in other words to an object which is allowed to be broken (Nussbaum 257). As Nussbaum states in her essay, most people do not think it is desirable to break an object on purpose. In this case, the type of object, whether it is expensive, valuable or not, does not matter (260). It should be no surprise that in none of the novels an occasion appears in which a woman is physically or mentally broken because she is treated as an object by a man, or more general objectifier as this not necessarily has to be a man. Naturally, there are situations to be found in which a woman feels mentally broken as life is not always without suffering for the protagonists. Instances in which heroines are mentally broken are usually related to work or their relationship. Nussbaum's indication that violability is something undesirable already implies it is something that does not occur often, especially not in relation to human beings and their relation towards each other (260). As violability hardly ever appears the concept seems rather needless on a list that shows how a person can be objectified.

### *Ownership*

Like violability ownership, indicating that "the objectifier treats the object as something that is owned by another" (Nussbaum 257), is not a feature of relevance when discussing objectification in chick-lit novels because it does hardly appear. The excerpts from *The Woman Who Stole My Life*, which are placed under some of the other concepts of objectification, together indicate what ownership could be. As long as Stella has a contract with her literary agent and publishing house she has to do everything they want. She has nothing to say about either her personal life or career. She has to change into someone she does not want to be, but as soon as she becomes useless they drop her without assisting her in any area. Useless, in this sense, means that her dedication is no longer needed. Her first novel did not hit the records, which both her agent and publisher expected, and as Stella is not

capable of writing a second novel her contract is ended and she is left with nothing. Even though this seems a rather decent example of ownership no other situations fit the description.

*Denial of subjectivity:*

‘But this girl is real. She has bad hair days, and good hair days. She wears G-strings even though she finds them uncomfortable. She writes out exercise routines, then ignores them. She pretends to read business journals but hides celebrity magazines inside them.’ I stare blankly at the television screen. Just...hang on a minute. This sounds a bit familiar. . . . ‘She loves clothes but she’s not a fashion victim,’ Jack is saying on screen. . . . ‘She reads fifteen horoscopes every day and chooses the one she likes best...’ (Kinsella, *Can You Keep A Secret* 258-259)

The quote from Kinsella’s, *Can You Keep A Secret* suits the concept denial of subjectivity because Jack ignores Emma’s feelings. Her feelings are ignored when he reveals her secrets on national television as part of the promotion of a new drink. According to Nussbaum denial of subjectivity means that “the objectifier treats the object as something whose experiences and feelings (if any) need not be taken into account” (257). The worst part is not the actual telling of the secrets, as other than her family and colleagues no one will know who she is, but the fact that he compares her to the girl next door which turns her into concept rather than a human being with her own personality and feelings. The excerpt below indicates another example of denial of subjectivity:

“I can’t take this job and wonder if I’m going to get fired every time the Chinooks lose a game.” “You don’t have to worry about that anymore.” She didn’t believe him, and if she did decide to take the job again, she wasn’t going to jump at the opportunity like last time. And truthfully, she was still severely ticked off. “I’m going to have to think about it.” (Gibson, *See Jane Score* 138)

Although the extract not directly shows the denial of Jane’s feelings indirectly it does. She has to cover for a male sports journalist, reporting ice hockey games which involves travelling with the team. The team do not respect her because she is a woman; they ignore her and make it impossible for her to do her work properly. They even blame her for losing matches, which leads to her dismissal. The excerpt shows the moment her boss asks her to continue with the job, an offer to which she is hesitant because her feeling are hurt already. Eventually she decides to continue with the job and the team starts to see and treat her as a person instead of an object. The reason behind this, partly, lies in Jane’s changed approach.

She no longer accepts the ignoring by the men. Furthermore, she gets more involved in the sport and the team through activities after the games.

The last example is the following from *The Woman Who Stole My Life*:

‘Who’s your agent?’ She shrugged, as if she couldn’t believe my stupidity.  
 ‘Mannix.’ ‘Mannix?’ I looked up at him. ‘Really?’ ‘Stella,’ he said. ‘We’re in a bad way financially, we need the money -’ ‘...So what becomes of me?’ I asked. (Keyes, *The Woman Who Stole My Life* 491)

When Stella does not get a contract for a second novel and her collaboration with Gilda turns out to be an illusion, her feelings are not saved by her boyfriend, Mannix. At that moment she is an object with no use to him as she is no longer providing money. He easily swaps her for Gilda. He does not want to take Stella’s feelings into account at all, which leaves her behind feeling betrayed by her best friend and lover. For him this is a rational decision, which implies he might not thought about what his decision would mean to Stella. However this does not mean she is not objectified in a way.

The examples mentioned were just a few out of many. These instances are chosen because they clarify how the idea behind denial of subjectivity works. As such, the concept is of main importance when discussing objectification in chick-lit novels.

#### *Reduction to Body:*

The first feature Langton added to Nussbaum’s list of seven concepts is reduction to body. This means that “an object is seen as similar to its body or parts of its body” (228). This feature can be hard to distinguish from the aspect reduction to appearance as the two seem to overlap at certain points. However, as Langton suggests reduction to body is often related to sexual relations in which the man is not interested in the woman for her personality, but purely for her body. In almost none of the novels is the protagonist treated as an object merely for her body. Most cases that involve a sexual relation involve a man that is not only interested in sex, but also in the woman herself; in a serious relationship. The reason for this might be found in the fact that they each tend to take control over their own sex life and sometimes even tend to objectify themselves. An instance that makes this rather clear is shown in the following passage:

‘Stop! I’m vanilla!’ I was shrieking with excitement and glee, and he collapsed onto me, laughing his head off. ‘Okay, we won’t do that again.’ He pulled me to him, his eyes sparkling. ‘But you want to be tied up?’ ‘No. Yes. I don’t know!’ ‘Right.’ He positioned me in the centre of the bed, stretched my arms

above my head, then wrapped his belt around my wrists and fastened it to a bar in the headboard. (Keyes, *The Woman Who Stole My Life* 312).

Although the male character takes initiative to do something outside the protagonist's comfort zone it is entirely with her permission and she can decide where her boundaries are. Mannix in no way forces Stella to something she does not want. In fact he does not treat her as an object as it comes to reduction of body. In an earlier scene it is Stella herself who takes initiative with her former husband.

The excerpt below again shows an example in which a man is only interested in the body of a woman, in this case Jane's body. Since she is not interested at all she makes clear she wants nothing to do with him.

Even though Jane was hardly ever in the *Seattle Times* building, she'd heard about Jeff Noonan. He was known by female staff as the Nooner and was a sexual harassment lawsuit just waiting to happen. Not only did he believe a woman's place was in the kitchen, he believed it was on her back on the kitchen table. The look he gave her told her he was thinking about her naked, and he smiled like she should be flattered or something. The look she returned told him she'd rather eat rat poison. (Gibson, *See Jane Score* 34)

#### *Reduction to Appearance:*

Examples of the second addition Langton made to Nussbaum's list can be found in all of the novels, which implies it is an important feature in chick-lit novels. Reduction of appearance can be defined as "one treats it primarily in terms of how it looks, or how it appears to the senses" (Langton 229). A selection is made out of the available examples to explain in more detail. The first one can be found in Kinsella's novel *Remember Me*:

Some of my hair has been messed up by the crash, but the rest is a bright, unfamiliar shade of chestnut, all straight and sleek with no one bit of frizz. My toenails are perfectly pink and polished. My legs are tanned golden-brown, and thinner than before. And more muscly. (Kinsella, *Remember Me* 50)

'You're talented and you're beautiful...' 'You don't think I'm beautiful.' 'Yes I do!' He seems affronted. 'Of course I do!' 'You think my collagen job is beautiful,' I corrected him gently, shaking my head. 'And my tooth veneers and my hair dye.' (424-425)

Lexi is a stereotype beauty; she meets all the criteria of the beauty ideal. However, she has to work really hard to keep her body in shape and had some surgeries to get this look.

Even though her husband likes her appearance she herself is not happy with it and decides to leave her husband because he does not love her for her personality, but merely for the way she looks. The man with whom she had an affair loves her for who she is and accepts her habits that do not fit in with the healthy life that belonged to the beauty ideal appearance.

Another example is shown in the passage below, which tells Stella's story. Although Stella is satisfied with her appearance, her agent is not. She treats Stella as a doll and the hairdresser goes along in this story by telling that her hair does not look like anything. The way she looks is what matters most to her agent, whether Stella is happy with her new look does not matter at all, the fact of the matter is she is judged on her appearance even more than on her writing.

Carmello twiddled a length of my hair around her finger and considered my reflection in the mirror. 'You've great hair,' she said. 'Thank you.' 'With a proper cut, it could be really something.' (Keyes, *The Woman Who Stole My Life* 399)

The last example concerns Jane. A plain looking woman who is never seen as the stereotypical beauty. Most times she is ignored by man as is the case in this scene.

Jane and the goalie had exchanged hellos and a handshake. His blue eyes had hardly fallen on her before he'd moved on with the blonde. In less than a second, she'd been found lacking and dismissed. But she was used to it. Men like Luc usually didn't pay much attention to women like Jane. Barely an inch over five feet, with dark brown hair, green eyes, and an A-cup. They didn't stick around to hear if she had anything interesting to say. (Gibson, *See Jane Score* 7)

Luc does not even take a moment to talk to Jane because purely based on her appearance he already determined he does not want anything to do with her. The importance of appearance becomes even clearer later on in the novel as Jane undergoes a transformation and only then Luc is interested in her as a person.

From these examples it might seem as if men are the only ones judging women on appearance, however, women themselves know how to play with their appearance and sometimes even tend to objectify themselves. This is a way to take control over their own beauty and no longer let the male population determine how they are supposed to look.



*Silencing:*

The final item, silencing, implies that as object is treated as “lacking the capacity to speak” (Langton 229). Naturally one should not take this too literally because there are no occasions in the novels in which one of the protagonists cannot speak. Silencing is interpreted as being ignored or not being able to express an own voice. In a way this is what happens to Jane in *See Jane Score*. Although she tries really hard to find her place within the ice hockey team and despite the fact that she works her butt off, the team ignores her and not one listens to a word she says. As a result, she is unable to execute her work properly. When the team realises Jane has feelings and some talent as well they start to treat her as an equal colleagues and she is no longer silenced:

Keeping her gaze on his face, Jane felt around in her purse for her tape recorder. She brought the notes she’d been taking throughout the game up to eye level. “Your defense allowed thirty-two shots on goal,” she managed between the other questions. “Are the Chinooks looking to acquire a veteran defenseman before the March nineteenth trade deadline?” . . . Mark looked through the other reporters at her and said, “That’s a question only Coach Nystom can answer.” So much for her brilliance. (Gibson, *See Jane Score* 96)

Lexi, like Jane, is silenced at work. After her memory loss her boss believes she cannot have good ideas anymore and when she wants to pitch an idea that could turn into a great deal for the company she is dismissed and ignored.

‘Actually ...’ My hands are damp and I curl them round the folder. ‘Actually, I wanted to speak to you. All of you. About something else.’ David Allbright looks up with a frown. ‘What?’ ‘Flooring.’ Simon winces. Someone else mutters, ‘For God’s sake.’ ‘Lexi.’ Simon’s voice is tight. ‘We’ve moved on. We’re no longer dealing in Flooring.’ ‘But I’ve done a deal!’ (Kinsella, *Remember Me* 410)

This dismissal is the biggest mistake her former boss makes because Lexi gets her hands on one of the old designs which she sells to Porsche. The negativity of the silencing for Lexi turns into something positive; a successful company on her own.

Even though there are some instances in which women are silenced in general it can be said that women in chick-lit novels have a strong voice. Most novels are told in I-narration, something which automatically strengthens the protagonists’ voices. Rachel Gibson’s novels are an exception on the rule and because these novels are told in third person narration the

protagonist's voice is less strong than the voices of the heroines in Kinsella's and Keyes' novels.

## **Conclusion**

Some of the features belonging to objectification are clearly visible in chick-lit novels. These concepts are denial of subjectivity, reduction to appearance, and reduction to body. Silencing and denial of autonomy sometimes occurs, while there is only one instance in which fungibility is relevant. Inertness, violability, and ownership are of no use at all in relation to chick-lit novels. According to Nussbaum's definition the term objectification can already be used when one of the items is relevant to a specific person. However, in most occasions a combination of features takes place at the same time (219). From the analysis of the novels it can be concluded that objectification takes place in chick-lit novels in a certain amount. It seems to happen in the same areas as in which women in the non-fiction world are objectified. However, one side note has to be made, it is not always clear if the women in the novels in general, but also in the examples in the chapter are actually treated as an object, which is the main condition on which the concepts are based.

The following paragraph explains what the results mean for the tension between conservative backlash and the girl power movement. The fact that women are objectified is one thing, but that it is accepted is part of the conservative backlash. Male domination inspired by a society in which the man rules over the woman definitely influenced the novel, as exemplified in the cases of denial of subjectivity and reduction to appearance. On the other hand, there are also several instances in which the protagonists take control over their own body and appearance. In these cases women use their sexuality to empower themselves which according to Smolak is a positive thing and belongs to the girl power movement. The same counts for the strong voice women have in chick-lit novels. Through first person narration they are offered a way to express their feelings and their view on things. It gives them the opportunity to leave male domination partly behind and stand up for themselves. The tension in chick-lit novels between the conservative backlash and girl power movement of course influences objectification. It makes that events occur that belong to the backlash side, which involves objectification of women. On the other hand it shows the girl power side of things which involves women taking control over their own lives. For now it is impossible to create a world in which objectification plays no part and analysis of the novels together with the theory have indicated that it should not always be seen as something negative because it can also have a positive effect on women and women's confidence.

### Tension in the Boundaries

‘If I ever have my face buried in your breasts again, I’m going to give you what you need so damn bad.’ ‘You have no idea what I need. Stay away from me,’ she said, and stormed out of the room, shutting the door behind her. (*Gibson, I’m In No Mood For Love* 252).

I’ve bought him an engagement ring. Was that a mistake? I mean, it’s not a girly ring. It’s plain band with a tiny diamond in it, which the guy in the shop talked me into. If Richard doesn’t like the diamond, he can always turn it round. (*Kinsella, Wedding Night* 11).

### Theory on Gender Relations

As the excerpts above indicate this chapter deals with gender relations in chick-lit novels. Frigga Haug notes “gender relations is a common expression in many fields of research, yet it is hardly ever clearly defined in conceptual terms” (279). The woman in the excerpt from *I’m In No Mood For Love* by Gibson clearly clarifies her boundaries and does not accept that a man dominates her. The woman in *Wedding Night* by Kinsella shows initiative in an area which traditionally belongs to the man. These are just two examples of the way the novels deal with the boundaries of gender relations.

A significant element within feminist theory is the analysis of gender relations. Important questions related to this topic are: “How gender relations are constituted and experienced” and “How we think or, equally important, do not think about them” (Flax 622). Since there is no clearly defined definition of gender relations almost every critic comes up with his or her own ideas about the concept. Raewyn Connell, for example, argues that gender relations consist of four dimensions, which are not completely separate of each other, but interweave. The first dimension is power relations, which refers to male domination over women (76). Furthermore, the “sexual division of labour” is of importance when forming gender relations (79). The third dimension is emotional relations, especially sexuality, for which the basis can be found in gender (81). The final point has to do with the meanings of gender, as these usually reach beyond biological categories (83). Despite the type of definition given to gender relations one should realise the meaning varies between, and even within cultures per historical period (Aronson 907, Mósesdóttir 624). These variations in meaning are mainly caused by the mutual interactions and interactions with social relations as race

(Flax 624). Despite the differences in definition “gender relations are always determined by economic, political, social and biological differentiation between men and women”

(Mósesdóttir 624). A society with structured gender relations can show two things at the same time. First of all, it can indicate rapid change which is related to changes in personality. On the other hand, it can show long-term stability which is related to an existing social structure (Curtis 136).

According to Haug, gender relations should be used to investigate the influences of gender on social relations because in essence gender emerges from social processes as unequal. This is problematic as all social relations turn into male dominated views if no attention is paid to this inequality (279). Research among women has proven that they think feminist principles, including equality, are crucial in twenty-first century society. However, they do not call themselves feminists because of the explicit ideas belonging to the feminist movement (Aronson 906). Lilja Mósesdóttir states that it is possible for a state to interfere in gender relations because of the strict division between public and private spheres (628). This results in three types of regulation, namely egalitarian, ecclesiastical, and liberal. In the first regulation women are clearly treated as inferior, while in the liberal system men and women are seen as equal (635).

Although ideas by other critics such as Connell are interesting and of importance to the development of the concept, this chapter analyses gender relations in chick-lit novels on the basis of a theory by Judith Gerson and Kathy Peiss. Like other scholars they do not succeed in providing a definite definition of the concept, but they do give a clear analysis of how the concept, according to them, works and what it involves. The point Gerson and Peiss are trying to make starts with an explanation of the origins of gender relations. According to them “gender is defined by socially constructed relationships between women and men, among women, and among men in social groups” (317). In this construction men and women belong to “distinct social groups” (318). This division is the basis of the concept of gender as a system of social relations. This concept incorporates three main points: separate spheres, domination of women, and sex-related consciousness. Gerson and Peiss define the first as “the different material and ideological worlds in which women and men work, live, and think” (318). Domination of women is “the forms and processes of physical intimidation, economic exploitation, and ideological control to which women are subjected” (318). The last point is referred to as “women’s distinctive experiences as a social category” (318). The concept outlined above is the basis of Gerson and Peiss’ model, which analyses gender as a system of social relations. They have named the main points differently and these points also have a

different meaning and content. The concept contains three main issues which together give a rather complete image of the what gender relations are and how they work (318). As these are the concepts which are later used to analyse the novels they are analysed in more detail in the next paragraphs.

The first concept which is important in relation to gender relations is boundaries: “[It] describes the complex structures – physical, social, ideological, and psychological – which establish the differences and commonalities between women and men, among women, among men, shaping and constraining the behaviour and attitudes of each gender group” (Gerson, Peiss 318). The concept boundaries finds its origins in the idea of two separate spheres. Women are traditionally placed in the domestic sphere, while men are placed in the public sphere (318). This idea of two distinct spheres is mentioned in several other research works on gender relations. Although the spheres were clearly separated for a long time nowadays the spheres are no longer as separate as they used to be. This, however, does not mean the spheres have completely blended with each other. For example, it is still hard for women to secure their place on the marketplace and men only get assigned particular jobs in the household.

Gerson and Peiss argue that talking about separate spheres is old-fashioned. The spheres tend to overlap and, thus, do not longer exist in their original forms, therefore, research should move away from a strict division to the interaction between the domestic and public spheres and start to think in terms of boundaries. Using the concept boundaries instead of spheres has three advantages. First of all, it is a more general term which makes it easier to move away from generalisations which adhere to the definition of spheres. At the same time it makes it possible to see commonalities and differences in the patterns of gender relations. Moreover, it allows research to move beyond the public-private-division discussion as there are many more boundaries to be found which divide men and women. Last but not least, boundaries suggest a sense of permeability, which is important as boundaries indicate “social territories of gender relations” (Gerson, Peiss 319). Boundaries are the places that indicate what is normal and what kind of behaviour deviates from normal behaviour in relation to gender relations (319).

Something that an analysis of boundaries can do, but which is not relevant for this thesis, is indicating stability and change in gender relations. Change in most of these cases is caused by social change (320). Although there are several boundaries, which all influence gender relations, one boundary is an umbrella under which all these boundaries can be placed. This primary boundary consists of the concepts masculinity and femininity and the social divisions these concepts have created (320). Thoughts about femininity and masculinity are

basically the basis of ideas society has on men and women and their relationships. Not only male-female relationships are influenced by boundaries, homosocial relations, in other words relations between the same sex, are also influenced by the same boundaries, while they themselves maintain and create these boundaries (321). Boundaries are thus of main importance in gender relations because “Boundaries between the sexes and within each sex, in their respective spatial, social, and psychological dimensions, delineate the structure of gender relations at a given time and place” (321).

The next concept is formed by interaction between negotiation and domination, which explains why men and women confirm and dissociate from the established gender relations. In this context “domination describes the systems of male control and coercion, while negotiation addresses the processes by which men and women bargain for privileges and resources. Each group has some assets which enable it to cooperate with or resist existing social arrangements, although clearly these resources and the consequent power are unequal” (Gerson, Peiss 318). Research on the topic of gender has indicated that the subordination of women is related to male domination. Research of the social life has proven that physical coercion is the primary source of domination. However, according to Gerson and Peiss women should not merely be seen as passive victims of this male dominated system of power (321). Women should not be blamed for their own oppression, but on the other hand a significant number of women does nothing to break the set boundaries of gender relations. Domination, in this context, seeks an explanation for the manners in which women are oppressed and in what kind of situations they accept this oppression and when they fight against it (322).

Negotiation does not stand on its own, but is closely related to domination. The concept negotiation suggests some kind of interaction between at least two parties. In case of gender relations these groups most times consist of men and women whom are both active participants in the negotiation. Men mostly invite women, but also women can and do bring things into the discussion, which lead to maintaining or changing structural boundaries. The process of negotiation takes place on the level of social groups (322). Although these negotiations seem fairly equal women do have a disadvantage because of their lack of power, which makes their negotiation position weaker. A fair conclusion is that negotiation does not make structural changes in gender relations. The changes that take place only slightly adjust the boundaries, which make it seem that something in the relation has changed, but in reality the existing gender relations are strengthened. Negotiation does change people's

consciousness, which can change the way women experience life, even if it does not structurally change gender relations (323).

The last concept, gender consciousness, also called women's consciousness, "is grounded conceptually in shared female experiences" (318). Furthermore, "it is also an interactive and multidimensional process, developing dialectically in the social relations of the sexes, and involving different forms of awareness among individuals and social groups" (318). Previous researchers of gender consciousness have focussed either on feminist or female consciousness. Feminist consciousness focuses "on the social and historical context which gives rise to an active awareness and visible consequences of that awareness" (324). Feminist consciousness is generally associated with people that are part of that movement. Female consciousness, on the other hand, focuses on "the outcome of women's unique set of experiences" (324). As a result of these two clear visions other types of consciousness are neglected. To understand how gender relations shape women's experience the interactions between the male and female social groups as well as interaction between women should be taken into consideration. Analyses of these types of interaction result in the explanation how gender consciousness develops and changes.

The analysis of consciousness is divided into three types. The first, gender awareness, is the most basic type, and also the basis for the other two types. This type of awareness is developed at a very young age and involves facts of everyday life. Even though, a great deal of research has proven that gender does not belong to sex, people continue to accept the existing social definitions which form the system of gender relations (324). Moreover, this acceptance leads to a society in which doubts and dissatisfactions about gender relations are called personal problems and the actual problems are never really tackled (325). Another form of consciousness is female or male consciousness. This type is based on gender awareness and builds further on the social definitions. It researches rights and obligations that belong to either being male or female. Female consciousness means acceptance of the gender system that a society has, which is the result of the interaction between domination and negotiation (325). While women learn to be inferior on the levels of intellect, moral, emotion, and physic men learn to be the opposite. Male consciousness, therefore, consists of a feeling of superiority, and individual autonomy. Male and female consciousness together determine where women position themselves in the boundaries. Male consciousness is the dominating part, which massively influence female's consciousness (326). Finally, feminist and antifeminist consciousness challenges the system of gender relations in the forms of ideology and shared group identity, as well as a growing politicisation which combined result in a

social movement. Feminist and antifeminist consciousness are related as well as female and feminist consciousness. It is hard to say something useful about this without doing research on the movement from one type to the other (326). Feminist consciousness is heavily influenced by feminism and has challenged gender relations. It has contributed to the development of boundaries as well as challenged the rules for male domination and negotiation (327).

### **Gender relations in the novels**

The following part of this chapter is divided into four subchapters, namely the ratio of male and female characters, relationships between men and women, relationships between women, and the target group of chick-lit novels. The analysis of the novels by Rachel Gibson, Marian Keyes, and Sophie Kinsella is based on the theory, which is extensively discussed above, by Gerson and Peiss. The focus will be on the events and actions which take place in the boundaries, whether these events are related to male domination, the effect of domination on the negotiation position of women, and the influence of all former on gender consciousness. As in the first chapter it is impossible to discuss all novels when it comes to applying theory to fiction. Therefore, the following novels are chosen for this chapter: *The Other Side of the Story*, *The Woman Who Stole My Life*, *I'm In No Mood For Love*, *Run To You*, and *Wedding Night*.

#### *Ratio male and female characters*

In spite of the lack of a clear connection with the theoretical frame of this chapter it is important to discuss the ratio between men and women in the novels as this gives some more details, that can be interesting to take into account, while actually discussing gender relations. A general conclusion about the male female ratio in the chick-lit novels used for this thesis is that most of the novels contain more female characters than male characters. However, it seems that the ratio differs per author, which causes different points of view on gender relations. To give a more detailed overview each author and her works are discussed separately. It would be too complicated and irrelevant to discuss every character that appears in the story, therefore, only the main characters, in other words characters crucial for the plot, are taken into account.

Firstly, the division between male and female characters in Gibson's novels. In both *Run to You* and *See Jane Score* the novel contains more male characters than female characters. They do not only outnumber them but they also seem rather dominant and overruling towards women. Even in *I'm In No Mood For Love*, in which the female characters



outnumber the males, the female voice is not as strong as the male's voice. This male domination seems to exist because of the third person narration of the novels. As all characters get a voice it is harder for the woman's voice to be the dominant one, especially if the male voice or voices are very present.

Kinsella's novels are almost the opposites of Gibson's. In two out of three, with *Wedding Night* as an exception, female characters overrule male characters in numbers. Both *Can You Keep a Secret?* and *Remember Me?* have a female protagonist with one main male counterpart. Furthermore, the plots are created around some minor male and female characters. *Wedding Night* deviates from the other two because it has two female protagonists, but also three rather important male characters as well as some minor male characters. A rather significant fact is that the number of male characters does not really matter for the development of the story because they are not given a voice. The reader only gets to know them through the eyes of the protagonist which tells her story in I-narration.

Last but not least, the ratio in Keyes' novels slightly differs from the one in Gibson's novels. The division between male and female characters is rather equal in *The Woman Who Stole My Life* and *Anybody Out There*, while women outnumber men in *The Other Side of the Story*. Like Kinsella's novels, the novels by Keyes are written in the first person and all three of them have a female protagonist. Although the male character's voices seems more visible as these in Kinsella's novels it are the female voices that rule.

In conclusion it can be said that it seems that the novels by Gibson which sometimes tend to lean more towards the traditional romance novel than the novels by the other authors has a tendency to have more male characters than female characters that are relevant for the plot. Although the main character is always a woman her voice is not as strong as in the novels by Keyes and Kinsella, who are typical chick-lit authors. The main reason for this is the fact that the novels by the latter two authors are told in I-narration, while Gibson's novels have a third person narrative. Furthermore, the female protagonist in Gibson's novels seem easier overruled by male characters. Thus, the male-female ratio is not the main thing that causes tension in the boundaries, but the voice given to the female characters, especially protagonists, is. The next sections in which the mutual relations are discussed indicate which kinds of tension are caused in the boundaries and whether or not there is tension to be found in all of the novels.

### *Male-female relations*

As Gerson and Peiss state, one of the main relationships relating to gender relations is the relation between men and women. This subchapter discusses the interaction between men and women. It will treat all three points of the theory, boundaries, domination and negotiation, and consciousness, separately and in connection with each other.

#### **Boundaries**

The first and main point on which the other two are based is boundaries. This section focuses on the changing relations between men and women, but also indicates instances in which the roles are still based on male domination. Relations between male and female characters seem to develop on two levels; at work or in a relationship. Both of these relations and their results are discussed below.

All novels have one thing in common, namely that all female characters have a job, each of them on a different level, but all have relatively good jobs, some with more potential than others. Moreover, the way women are treated at work is relevant for the gender relations coming out of it. Two types of women can be distinguished in work related relations with men, namely the ones who are under strict supervision of a male boss, and women who have some kind of authority. The first category causes hardly any differences in the boundaries because they are almost always dominated by their male superior, who like her other colleagues, does not take the protagonist and her ideas serious or sexually harasses her because of his superior position gives him the power to do so. An example of the latter situation can be found in *Run To You*:

He grabbed her arm, and his booze-soaked breath smacked her across the face. "Party with us." She took a step back but he didn't release her. Her Mace was in her backpack, and she couldn't get to it one-handed. "I can't." Anxiety crept up her spine and sped up her heart. . . . She really didn't want to shove the heel of her hand in his nose or her knee in his junk. She wanted to keep her job. She made good money and was good at it. (Gibson, *Run To You* 22-23)

Stella clearly sets her boundaries, but her boss keeps sexually harassing her after and during work. Her fear to lose her job refrains her from taking real measures against him. Although this is an extreme example of a male dominating a female, women, in the novels which are not discussed in this chapter, are dominated as well. In these cases their ideas are not appreciated or colleagues take credit for them.

An example of an event that indicates change in the boundaries can be found in the excerpt below:

To Mannix, I said, 'Would you be willing to give up your job for a year?'  
 '...For a year?' He went into some place in his head and I held my breath,  
 hoping against hope. 'Yeah,' he said, slowly. 'For a year, yes, I think I would.'  
 'What about you?' he asked. 'Are *you* okay giving up your job for a year?' It  
 was nice of him to ask, but to me, mine wasn't a 'real' job, not like his. (Keyes,  
*The Woman Who Stole My Life* 374)

While normally a woman gives up her job for her husband's career in this case the opposite happens. Mannix gives up his successful career as neurologist to move with Stella to New York where her writing career should flourish. The fact that the man is willing to give up his career for his girlfriend's career implies that more equality is raising on this level.

Like in the boundaries of the work related relations, in the boundaries of relationships some remarkable things happen. In *Wedding Night* the traditional views on masculinity and femininity are challenged by the fact that Lottie buys an engagement ring for him:

I have bought him an engagement ring. Was that a mistake? I mean, it's not a *girly* ring. It's a plain band with a tiny diamond in it, which the guy in the shop talked me into. If Richard doesn't like the diamond, he can always turn it round. (Kinsella, *Wedding Night* 11)

At the end of the novel she actually proposes, which leads to their engagement. Although it has become more common for a woman to ask and thus accepted for women to take over traditions that used to be linked to men a certain amount of people still believes it is something masculine. In the novel *I'm In No Mood For Love* the colour pink as well as romance novels are called feminine and men, preferably women as well, should stay far away from it. In general it seems as that the relationships are based on equality. Although there are some instances in which the man is dominant women tend to show they are no pushover, and there is space for movement in the boundaries.

### **Domination and Negotiation**

An analyses of the boundaries related to the relation between male and female characters in the novels indicates that male domination still has an enormous influence, especially on the work floor. In a part of the novels the protagonists have to fight really hard for their career opportunities and the recognition that goes with their hard work. Although the fight might be tough the heroines are not willing to give up and accept male oppression.

Jojo in *The Other Side of the Story* is in competition with her male colleague over a place as partner of the company. When the final vote is held she loses and according to her this is because she is a woman and she will probably leave the company temporarily to become a mother in the future. It is, therefore, safer to choose a male partner:

Then Jojo got it and surprise, more than anything made her blurt, 'It's because I'm a woman!' She'd heard about this but never thought it would happen to her. 'It's the glass ceiling!' (Keyes, *The Other Side of the Story*, 548)

Instead of accepting her faith she decides to start her own agency, which turns out to be a huge success. Although it seemed as if she was fighting to reach something impossible she made eventually made it. Like the other women who struggle with male domination at work she does not want to give up her opportunity to an equal treatment and the chance on a smashing career. This does not mean all women have a career because there are plenty examples to be found in the novels of women who are happy with their feminine jobs such as an author of romance novels.

Since the protagonist's relations on personal level are much more equal than at work they do not have a severe urge against some male domination now and then. There is plenty of space for them to make changes in the boundaries, and although there will always be a certain structure the terms masculinity and femininity start to loosen up in this area.

The still existing male domination at work weakens women's position in negotiations because they lack a certain type of experience. As long as there is no equal treatment between men and women it is impossible for them to gain this experience and be as strong in negotiations about crucial things at work or on a private level. However, the fact that women lack experience does not imply they cannot bring interesting topics into the discussion already. The changes taking place on the boundaries are a step in the right direction for negotiation position of women. The boundary is the fine line between the accepted and the new deviating things occurring on the other side of this line. The changes, which are probably merely caused by the disappearance of the private and public spheres, make it easier for women to make their point and men to actually listen to what they have to say.

### **Consciousness**

Since there is still a high amount of male dominance in the real world as well as in chick-lit novels it is hard for women to accept or receive a new consciousness as this is based on social situations, in other words if society does not change it is hard for women to do so. Although some changes are taking place on the side of women; they start to move away from their

subordinate positions, men need some more work because they are not ready to give up their dominating role. In the novels the first steps towards equality are already made and although it is only a beginning the mindset of women has changed. To change the actual gender relations much more is needed and the question is if this will ever happen or that there will always be a certain type of inequality between men and women.

### *Female-female relations*

This subchapter shows the same type of analysis as the section on male-female relations, but in this case the focus is on the relation within female groups, or simply said between female characters. As mentioned before these relations influence and are influenced by the boundaries between men and women. In the nineteenth century, for example, female friendships were focused on the home, which helped to maintain the division between private and public also known as female and male. Currently, this division is not relevant anymore, therefore, the focus is more on divisions within the same sex which in itself are influenced by the relations between men and women. An example of this kind of division is between young and old on the basis of attractiveness, something which is not applicable for men (Gerson and Peiss 321).

### **Boundaries**

In all novels homosocial relations between female characters are present. These relations are either based on friendship or family bonds, which in itself are sometimes related to the work related situations.

In Kinsella's novels *Wedding Night*, as well as in Gibson's *Run to You* and *I'm In No Mood For Love* a relationship between two female characters who are family has a central place in the boundaries of gender relations. In the former two the mutual relation is sisters. The relation between Lottie and Fliss is disturbed because of the lack of proper parents.

Richard is perfect. He's everything I could ever have wanted for Lottie. Which sounds motherly – but then I *do* feel motherly towards her. Always have. Our own parents both kind of gave up on the job, what with the divorce and the alcohol and the affairs with loaded businessmen and South African beauty queens... Put it this way: we were left alone a lot. Lottie is five years younger than me, and, well before our mother died, she started turning to me when things went wrong. (Kinsella, *Wedding Night* 119)

Since Lottie tends to see Fliss as a replacement of her mother instead of merely as her sister, Fliss starts to act like a mother as well. This results into her being overprotective towards Lottie and even sabotaging Lottie's honeymoon because she does not agree with the choice Lottie made. Although this relation is unusual it does not necessarily change anything in the boundaries of gender relations.

A second example of a relation between sister can be found in the excerpt below:

"I didn't know if you'd come." "I did," she stated the obvious and instantly felt stupid. Sadie went to college. She was smart. She – "I'm so glad." Sadie put her hand on the peach-colored blouse covering her stomach and smiled. "I've been nervous as a long-tailed cat." (Gibson, *Run To You* 245)

Sadie and Stella have never met each other before, but from the first moment they meet they feel connected with each other and start to build on their relation. As the former example this relationship does not change anything in the boundaries. Something that does change the boundaries of gender relations is the relation between Clare and her mother in *I'm In No Mood For Love*.

Clare had always known how her mother felt about her writing, but Joyce had always ignored her career, pretending instead that she wrote "women's fiction" – right up until the day Clare had been featured in the *Idaho Statesman* and the Wingates' dirty secret was out of the closet and splashed across the Life section. Clare Wingate, writing under the pen name Alicia Grey, graduate of Boise State University and Bennington, wrote historical romance novels. (Gibson, *I'm In No Mood For Love* 17)

As the excerpt shows Clare's mother does not like Clare's career, which is a very successful one. She is ashamed of it because it is associated with extreme femininity, while she believes that women should have equal rights to men and thus should not get stuck in feminine careers.

The other type of relation which is of importance in the novels is friendship. As discussed in the first chapter on objectification female beauty is significant for twenty-first century society, and women are more than once judged on their appearance. It should therefore be no surprise that this idea changes some things in the boundaries of female relations. In *Wedding Night*, for example, Lottie is given a makeover by a group trainee make-up artists:

'That's not what I mean.' She approaches the platform, brandishing a massive black roll of brushes at me. 'I'm Jo. Fancy a makeover?' 'Oh.' I hesitate and

glance at my watch. 'I couldn't. I mean, that's very kind of you...' 'Don't take it personally,' says Jo kindly, 'but you need it.' (Kinsella, *Wedding Night* 82)

Lottie gets the makeover because the make-up artists want to thank her for her advice and want to cheer her up because she feels heartbroken. There is no male pressure involved in any of this and neither is their jealousy among the women. As jealousy is relevant for the discussion of female relations this example indicates that not all relations, especially private relations, are due to fail because of jealousy, but that women actually start to help each other to establish more power against male dominance.

In contrast with private relations, there is an extensive amount of envy on the work floor. In *The Woman Who Stole My Life* Stella loses one of her best friends, Gilda, because Gilda gets the book deal Stella aimed for. Gilda's success indirectly causes the end of Stella's career. Another example is to be found in the following abstract from *The Other Side of the Story*:

I felt out in the cold and excluded from the loop because I was the only person in the whole world who still thought Anton was rightfully mine. Everyone else *everywhere* thought Lily's claim to him was legitimate. The bitter injustice. She'd stolen him, but instead of treating her like the common criminal she was, everyone was slapping her on the back congratulating her, 'Well done, that's a lovely partner you've got there.' (Keyes, *The Other Side of the Story* 27)

Gemma and Lily used to be best friends, but when Lily gets together with Gemma's ex-boyfriend, whom she still fancies, things go totally wrong and their friendship is over. However, Gemma's jealousy goes further. When Lily writes a successful novel Gemma decides to write one as well and tries everything in her power to get the same literary agent and publisher and tries to make them get rid of Lily. Her plan, like her novel, fails, while Lily's career flourishes. Here the initial problem turned into a battle for the best career, which indicates that women at the competitive labour market are not as supportive towards each other as they were as housewives. It seems that the competition at work, which influence the boundaries of male to female relations, also influence the female to female relations at work.

### **Domination and negotiation**

The changes that take place in the boundaries of female to female relations are directly related to male domination. On the level of private relations male dominance is rather absent and women tend to support each other in their struggles with men. An example of this is that of Lottie's makeover, which is mentioned in the previous section. A major part of this is that

women recognise their own beauty as something for themselves instead of adjusting it for others, especially males.

On the other hand, when it comes to relationships connected to career opportunities, women sometimes see each other as rivals. They envy each other and even end friendships because of this. This rivalry among women changes the boundaries because it causes more competition, but the question is whether fighting each other is very helpful for their position on the labour market. Because they also have to compete with men for a position higher in the hierarchy of the labour market and they did not realise any changes in those boundaries it might be useful to first create equality between men and women at the marketplace before women start to compete with each other on an extreme level. Moreover, it seems as if jealousy between women helps to maintain male dominance. Instead of competing with each other women should support one other and together fight against male domination. In the case of Lexi, from *Remember Me*, her female subordinates do not support her because of her business attitude, which is direct and sometimes unfriendly. As even her female subordinates not accept her authority it becomes even easier for male subordinates to deny it. If she had the support of her female subordinates males would more easily do as well which opens opportunities for females to work in higher positions.

### **Consciousness**

With the disappearance of the public and private spheres several things have changed for women and their relations. However, this does not mean their consciousness has changed as well. Not only do they have to compete with men, but sometimes also with their friends and allies. As explained in the section above sometimes it is of more relevance to form an ally of females to compete against male colleagues. However, this does not mean that this should always be the case, but merely in situations that seem to be open for it.

### *Target group chick-lit novels*

This final subchapter again, like the first part of the analysis, does not necessarily have a direct link with the theory, but in a way is related to gender relations. Especially, the subjects dealt with in chick-lit novels and the reading audience the genre attracts.

A decade ago, publishers realised that chick-lit was becoming one of the best-selling genres on the market. In 2002, chick-lit publishers earned over 71 million dollar with sales and in the same year seven chick-lit novels maintained the *Publisher Weekly* best-seller list for a total of ninety weeks (Ferris, Young 2). The popularity of the genre can, according to



readers and authors of chick-lit novels, be ascribed to the genre's realistic approach. The novels reflect on situations of everyday life which often involves a single woman in her twenties or thirties who is struggling with the balance between her career and personal life (3). The target group has the same age and lifestyle as the protagonists of the novels. One of the reasons can relate to the novels is because the protagonists are not flawless, which creates sympathy instead of envy (3).

Critics, on the other hand, sometimes cannot even be bothered to call the genre fiction (2). They blame the genre to tell the same story over and over again, showing women an improved version of reality in which everything is still possible (7). According to Ferris and Young in *Chick lit*, it is not relevant for the fans and authors what critics say as they believe they should be able to portray women in fiction in the way they are represented in society of that age without fearing for a growing gap of inequality with men (9). Readers of chick-lit novels in a certain way seem to agree with some of the ideas that third wave feminists have and do want to be treated equal as men. However, they think feminist ideas are rather explicit and they do not want to connect themselves to it. Chick-lit's progressive ideas on gender relations might add to the genre's popularity.

## Conclusion

As the analysis of the novels in relation to the theory on boundaries, domination and negotiation, and consciousness indicated some shifts are taking place in the boundaries relating to male-female relations and female-female relations. When it comes to relations between men and women these changes merely take place of a personal level. As there is a sense of equality on this matter women are free to explore their masculine side and vice versa. In some instances male domination is visible, which is not considered to be a problem, and, therefore, accepted by both men and women. Changes in the boundaries do hardly take place when it comes to the situation at work, where women often have to fight against domination by male colleagues.

Relations between female characters develop exactly the opposite from relations between men and women. Private sphere relations hardly change the boundaries, although acceptance of the self is rather important. However, they do change when it comes to relations related to work, more specifically career. Instead of sticking together in their fight against male domination women also fight against each other, which makes their position at the labour market weaker.

The fact that there are changes taking place in the boundaries does mean that gender relations in chick-lit novels are influenced by the girl power movement. More specifically, more equality in private relations and thus more freedom for female characters indicates a progressive view. Although it seems remarkable, the envy on the labour market between women does this as well because previously they all had the same silly jobs. On the other hand, male domination indicates there are still some views of the backlash visible. In general, gender relations in chick-lit novels tend to be more influenced by the girl power movement than by the conservative backlash.

## Job or Career

Complete horror dropped her jaw, and she raised a hand to her mouth. She'd figured that there might be some small minds in the newsroom who'd assumed she's exchanged sexual favors with Leonard Callaway, because after all, he was the managing editor and she was just that woman who wrote that silly column about being single in the city. she wasn't a *real* journalist. (Gibson, *See Jane Score* 83)

'So I don't want to be a snake!' I know I sound almost hysterical, but I can't help it. 'No one likes snakes! I'm more like a ... a squirrel. Or a koala.' Koalas are soft and furry. And a bit snaggly. 'A *koala*? Lexi!' Eric laughs. 'Darling, you're a cobra. You have timing. You have attack. That's what makes you a great businesswoman.' (Kinsella, *Remember Me* 243)

As the excerpts above indicate the focus of this chapter is on work or more specifically on female career opportunities in chick-lit novels and how these can be interpreted in relation to postfeminist ideas. In the passage from *See Jane Score*, Jane's abilities as a journalist are downsized because of the type of columns she writes. Her talent is not taken seriously based on the genre her boss makes her write. This indicates that although men and women can both have the same type of job certain aspects within the field are seen as feminine, while others are called masculine. Lexi in *Remember Me* is an example of a woman who has adapted to the businessman's manners. She does not mimic male counterparts, but gives her own spin to the aspects she considers to be important for a leader. She has the same toughness and although it is appreciated by her husband, it is not by her colleagues. This is especially not the case for the ones who used to be her friends, and by the male colleagues who cannot forgive her for getting 'their' job.

The excerpts are examples of two of the most important elements that have to be dealt with when it comes to female careers in chick-lit novels. First of all it is important to note what kind of professions women in this type of novels have. Furthermore, it is relevant to analyse what sort of relationships exist between male and female colleagues at work. This theoretical part discusses some ideas on these matters. The second part of this chapter focuses on the analyses of the novels in relation to these theories. The conclusion brings together both elements and discusses them in relation to the tension between the conservative backlash and the girl power movement.

Halfway through the twentieth century, women carefully started entering the labour market. In the beginning they were only hired for low-maintenance jobs. As they had to take care of the household as well these jobs were mainly part-time occupations. When the twenty-first century approaches an increasing number of women start to work full-time to be able to support themselves. The influx of women on the labour market started the adaptation to females, but the separation between men and women is still visible. Although the segregation became smaller and opportunities were opened for women to enter the top of organisations the percentage of women actually having a position in “middle-and-top-management positions” is still remarkably low (Kvanda, Rasmussen 115). Former research by Women in Management blames women themselves for their absence in top-positions. They state that women do not have enough ambition to obtain and maintain a job in the higher segments of a company. Furthermore, Women in Management argues that women lack a certain amount of self-confidence which is needed to occupy such a position (116). Of course there are women who do have enough ambition and self-confidence to make it to the top. The analysis later on in this chapter indicates to which category women in chick-lit novels belong.

### **Occupations in Chick-lit Novels**

In her article “Mothers of Chick Lit? Women Writers, Readers, and Literary History” Juliette Wells notes that all heroines of chick-lit novels have a job. These jobs range from leading positions in rather large companies to unappreciated low key jobs. Thus, even though the world in which women are merely housewives has disappeared women nowadays still do not have glorious careers. Career by definition means “a job or profession that you have been trained for, and which you do for a long period of your life” (Longman Dictionary Online) which does not corresponds with the meaning Wells has in mind. For her a career is something more than merely a job; a job that provides on with a certain status and for which one has to work really hard to reach this. It usually involves a high position within an organisation. Wells mentions several reasons for the fact that women lack a career. These reason are rather similar to the arguments Women in Management had for the low number of women in top-positions. First of all, women tend to doubt their own abilities and as a result are afraid to mention and/or show them. In this way no one sees their qualities and therefore they are stuck in jobs below their actual abilities. Furthermore, most chick-lit heroines secretly long for a family life with a loving husband and children, which might be considered to be part of the backlash. This is hard to combine with a time-consuming career. It is, therefore, logical that the protagonist’s career is usually a subplot within the main plot rather

than the actual main theme (Wells 54). Wells also mentions a more structural problem when it comes to the lack of booming female career opportunities. In present day society it is still considered more normal for men to have a career than for women, more specifically for women with a partner and/or children. Authors of chick-lit novels know this and have a certain fear towards talking about women's ambition. The everlasting division between men and women makes it hard to deviate too much from reality in the novels (57).

Rosalind Gill confirms Wells' view on career possibilities for women in chick-lit novels. She notes that chick-lit heroines often have poorly paid positions, which reflect on the current situation in real life in which most women work in low-paid jobs in the service sector (237). While Gill notes that women in real life often work in the service sector, Molly Fisher argues that a large number of chick-lit protagonists has a job as journalist. A perfect job for women because it used to be something new, which gave excitement and stability at the same time. And while these conditions have changed the jobs are still popular, journalism comes with a lot of insecurities. More than one chick-lit author has a background in this field of expertise, which makes it easier to write a well-structured novel about a career-woman.

Furthermore, it should be noted that in most novels the protagonists' career, at least slightly, improves or is brought to a completely different level (Wells 54). An analysis of the novels will provide insight if women indeed have low-paid jobs and if these jobs can be placed in a certain field on the labour market. Lastly, this part also gives some attention to the relation between the author's educational background and the career of the women in the novels. Of course, the career development over the course of the novel is also taken into account.

### **The Familial Model**

Aside from the arguments mentioned in the previous section one other theory is relevant for the analysis of this chapter. This theory by Richard Curtis and Patricia MacCorquodale expresses an interesting view on the relation between men and women at work. Their hypothesis is based on the idea that most organisations have a particular model on which they base organisational structures. The major advantage of this fixed model are the fixed rules, which create a problem free environment when it comes to organisational purposes. This advantage also has a downside as it hardly leaves any space for new ideas as it is hard to break through the existing model (141).

Whether or not a model, as well as what type of model an organisation uses becomes particularly visible when a group of outsiders, such as women, tries to enter the company.

Since women are the focus of this thesis, they will serve as the primary example to explain this principle. There are three manners in which men treat women who enter an organisation. First of all, the worst thing men can do is treat women as enemies because they are not. A work environment with a mixed group of people brings more variety as well as new insights into existing matters. Even though they enter the labour market and should have the same rights as their male counterparts, this does not mean they are a threat to men's positions. Luckily, situations in which women are treated as unwelcome competition hardly ever occur in practice. In an ideal situation men would treat women at the workplace as equals, but this seems hard for some men. If a man does not treat a woman according to either of the two ways mentioned previously it is likely he treats her as his mother, daughter, or wife, in other words as a family member.

Richard Curtis and Patricia MacCorquodale called the treatment of people at work as family members "the familial model of organisations" (142). This model is available in every society, but the content can differ due to cultural differences. Initially, the model worked rather well because men were not used to women, especially not women who did jobs men used to do, entering the labour market. Keeping the same roles as in the private sphere happened among men as well. The traditional division between men and women soon emerged into relations at work similar to relations in the private sphere. One of the most stereotypical examples is the relation between doctor and nurse, assuming that the doctor is male and nurse is female. In this case the male is higher in rank and the female assists him in his work a similar relation as husband and wife (142).

Familial models make it easier for men to deal with the position of women in the labour market. They struggle more when the familial model cannot be applied. The model does ascribe certain types of professions to women. These jobs are usually related to feminine qualities such as caring (142). However, this does not mean that the model is a medium to oppress women. Their position in relations to the position of the men determines which and if familial role belongs to it. Naturally, there are no problems for women with a lower position than men because they have to treat him as their superior anyway. Trouble emerges when a woman has a leading position. An assisting position on a high level gains a lot of respect because a man sees her as a mother and in most cases there is respect towards that person. Nevertheless, the age of a woman might cause some problems in this situation as it would be hard for a middle-aged male to see a twenty-five year old woman as his mother. A direct leading position however would be more difficult as this is deviant from the traditional male-female pattern and as such harder to accept (142).

In addition to the mother-son relation, there can also be a father-daughter relation or a husband-wife relation. Although these relations may help people who do not know how to deal with the changing positions it is also risky because it can easily turn into stereotyping (143). It is relevant to note that not everyone has the same ideas and experiences with these social relations, but most people have a common idea that belongs to terms as ‘father’ and ‘wife’ to which everyone in society can relate themselves and which have a gender feel over them (142). In the second part of this chapter the focus will be on the analysis of the novels in the way of the familial mode. It will indicate whether relations as mentioned in the theory are present, especially in relation to women in leading positions and the way male characters react to this.

In the conclusion, attention is paid to the relations of career and postfeminism. The fact that women have an employment seems progressive, however, the type of position might mean chick-lit novels are still stuck in the backlash.

### **Women’s Careers in the Novels**

In this section attention is paid to the influence of the author’s educational background on the protagonists’ careers and to the actual jobs and its development throughout the novels. Some general comments are made about all nine novels incorporated in this novel, however, when it comes to details and examples five novels are taken into account, which are *Can You Keep A Secret?*, *Remember Me*, *Anybody Out There*, *The Other Side of the Story*, and *See Jane Score*.

#### *Careers of the Protagonists*

The nine novels contain a total of fifteen female characters of whose job is of some sort of importance for the plot. Like Wells predicted all of them have a job, but this does not mean they all have a career. As mentioned previously it is not possible neither relevant to discuss all these jobs in detail and therefore the previously mentioned selection is used for the analysis between job and career.

In three instances a female character has a career instead of just a job. These include Lexi from *Remember Me*, who is Director of the Flooring department:

It’s a card from the company I work at, Dellar Carpets – although they’ve been given a new trendy logo. And the name is printed in clear charcoal grey: Lexi Smart Director, Flooring. (Kinsella, *Remember Me* 52)

Her position implies that she is responsible for this department, which unfortunately is not going to last any longer. Not because of her, she is a talented woman, but because of the lack

of interest in flooring. The fact that people call her ‘the cobra’ indicates she managed to get at least a certain amount of respect as a supervisor. The second protagonist with a career is Anna from *Anybody Out There*:

I work in New York City as a beauty PR. I am Assistant VP for Public Relations for Candy Grrrl, one of the hottest cosmetic brands on the planet. (Keyes, *Anybody Out There* 21)

Anna is dedicated to her job and even when she is dreadfully injured she worries about it. Furthermore, she dedicates a large part of her time to her job with which she impresses her boss. The last woman who has a career is Jojo in *The Other Side of the Story*:

A look from Jojo silenced him abruptly and when he spoke again he was a little less buoyant. ‘This is a great desk you have here, Jojo. What about lying on it, on your side, giving a big wink?’ ‘I’m a literary agent. Have a little respect!’ (Keyes, *The Other Side of the Story* 97)

Jojo has her personal assistant, who only people with a rather important position have. Furthermore, she is appreciated by her colleagues for the clients she brings into the company. Last but not least, she is competing with a male colleague to become the company’s new partner, which is only a realistic option for someone who is doing really well in their job. One last note; neither of Gibson’s novels contains a woman with a career.

Despite the fact that only three female characters have a career this does not necessarily imply that the jobs the other women have are specifically female oriented. Of course, some jobs, such as party planner, are more female oriented than others, such as marketing executive. However, in general there is a nice mix between jobs seen as feminine and jobs seen as masculine. Furthermore, the positions at work of almost all protagonists improve during the novel.

The women with a flourishing career from the start of the novel extend this career even further, which makes their careers even more noteworthy. Lexi, who is no longer able to deal with the terms belonging to her job as director of flooring starts her own company.

This company wants to use one of our old retro carpet designs. Like, a special, high-profile limited edition. . . . The directors are letting me license the old designs as an independent operator. (Kinsella, *Remember Me* 416)

As she does not obey to the company’s rules she is dismissed, and the directors do not care to consider her suggestions. In fact, they do not even listen to her. For Lexi it is the best thing that could happen to her because she has a massive deal with Porsche and she becomes owner of her own company.



Anna, who starts as a beauty PR, is involved in the promotion of a new, secret, beauty, product Formula 12. Her pitch is chosen to be the best one and this means she no longer represents Candy Grrrl, but is head of Formula 12: a huge promotion. This promotion gives her more power, power to negotiate about things that are important for her and the representation of the brand:

‘No, we don’t want you to quit.’ ‘Ten grand more, two assistants and charcoal suits. Take it or leave it.’ Arielle swallowed. ‘Okay to the money, okay to the assistants, but I can’t green-light charcoal suits. Formula 12 is Brazilian, we need carnival colours.’ ‘Charcoal suits or I’m gone.’ ‘Orange.’ ‘Charcoal.’ ‘Orange.’ ‘Charcoal.’ ‘Okay, charcoal.’ It was an interesting lesson in power. (Keyes, *Anybody Out There* 486)

This power belongs to someone with a leading position as it is important to dissipate a certain authority.

Jojo, whose career was going great until she failed to make it to partner and felt betrayed, like Lexi starts her own literary agency:

‘Are you setting up on your own in a personal capacity as well as a professional one?’ Funny she hadn’t really decided what to do, not until that moment.’ (Keyes, *The Other Side of the Story* 568)

Not only does she set up her own agency, she makes it a successful one.

Not as easy as it sounds, we’re not all Jojo Harvey, who now has fabulous coloured-glass offices in Soho and four people working for her, including her old assistant Manoj. (Keyes, *The Other Side of the Story* 647)

The jobs of the other women also become less basic and sometimes even seem to move towards a career. Jane in *See Jane Score* is an example of these women. At the start of the novel everyone thinks she is just the author of a column for women:

What Leonard Callaway didn’t say was that Duffy had thought of her because he thought she wrote fluff for women. Which was okay with Jane; fluff helped her pay her bills and was wildly popular with women who read the *Seattle Times*. But fluff didn’t pay all the bills. Not even close. Porn paid most of them. And the porn serials, *The Life of Honey Pie*, she wrote for *Him* magazine were wildly popular with males. (Gibson, *See Jane Score* 5)

Her *Honey Pie* column is a secret between her and her boss because it should keep its mystery. Moreover, this side job is not very relevant to the rest of her career, but her time as reporter of the ice hockey team is. She has to fight for her spot on the team in the beginning,

but in the end she is a respected journalist, which is an improvement from an author of ‘fluffy’ columns.

Not all woman get a better job throughout the novel. Gemma from *The Other Side of the Story* starts the novel as an inspiring party planner making a career move mostly out of revenge on her former best friend. She tries to become an author but miserly fails, which leaves her to go back to her old job. Although there is no real improvement noticeable she has learned many things and she actually enjoys and always enjoyed her job as party planner.

In general it can be said that some women in chick-lit novels do have careers and that they seemingly evolve throughout the novels. The women without careers do have jobs, which are not always particularly feminine in terms of profession, and in most cases there seems to be some progress in them throughout the novel as well.

### *Careers of the Authors*

As mentioned in the introduction of this thesis, Sophie Kinsella studied Politics, Philosophy and Economics in Oxford. After graduating she became a financial journalist before becoming a successful chick-lit author. Although this probably was not completely in line with what she thought she would be after graduating does correspond with Fisher’s idea on the career of chick-lit authors. Marian Keyes who studied Law and Accountancy unlike Kinsella did not have a media related job. Soon after her graduation she become a full-time writer. Almost the same can be said about Rachel Gibson. As nothing can be found about her education it is assumed that she started her writing career without having any further academic education. In short, Keyes and Gibsondo not confirm Fisher’s idea that authors of chick-lit novels have a background in journalism.

An analysis of the main female character’s jobs shows that Fisher’s theory does not really work out when it comes to the novels and authors discussed in this thesis. Only one of the protagonists is a journalist, which is a relatively low number for nine novels. On the other hand if the term journalism is broadened to the publishing world the number of women working in this area of expertise increases. As the section above mentioned the main female characters have careers in the area of beauty pr as well as jobs as hotel reviewer.

The most striking thing in relation to the careers of the authors and the careers of the protagonists in their novels is that the novels of Kinsella, who herself had a job as journalist, have the least characters in the publishing world. Only one of her novel contains characters that have a job in that area, while the women’s careers in two of Gibson’s novels are part of

the publishing world, and in case of Keyes novels all three of them contain characters with a career in that world.

Another remarkable fact is the amount of writing female characters the novels contain. Again Kinsella is an exception because of the novels by her read for this thesis none of the characters is an author. In the novels by the other authors several authors have an important role. Some novels even contain multiple authors, an example is *The Other Side of the Story* by Keyes. Although Fisher's theory on journalism is not in accordance with the novels of this thesis it seems that authors of chick-lit novels use their own experience as authors in their novels and like to give their protagonist a writing career, which is not always as successful as their own.

### **Familial Model in the Novels**

This section focuses on the protagonist's position in the hierarchy and what this position means for the relation with colleagues. The same novels as in the previous section are used to discuss some examples in more detail. Although the theory on familial models suggested that it can be applied to almost all organisations and it would thus also be visible in relations at work in chick-lit novels. However, the opposite is true. The main reason for this can probably be found in the fact that only a few of the protagonists have male colleagues.

The most clear example in which the familial model can be applied is that of Lexi. As mentioned before Lexi is director of the flooring department and as such has a whole department under her supervision.

'Simon!' I'm gulping air in my panic. 'Could I possibly have a quick work?'  
 'Lexi.' As he looks up I can see a wrinkle of irritation on his brow. 'Hi.' I look around, checking there's no one nearby to overhear. 'I just wanted to...to...clarify a couple of things. These plans to disband the Flooring section.' I tap the folder. 'That can't mean... you can't mean...' 'She's finally twigged.'  
 Byron folds his arms, shaking his head with such amusement I want to punch him. He *knew* about this? (Kinsella, *Remember Me* 316)

The passage above shows one of many occasions in which Byron undermines Lexi's authority. He does not take her seriously as his supervisor and it becomes very clear that he wants her job. He does this by blacken her in front of her boss as well as in front of colleagues. Byron cannot deal with a woman in a leading position to whom he has to adhere. As her position is higher in the hierarchy he cannot label her as a female family member because these never overrule males.

Not only Byron has difficulties with Lexi being the boss, her former friends of whom she is now their direct superior are not happy with the change of Lexi's personality.

‘Darling, you’re a cobra. You have timing. You have attack. That’s what makes you a great businesswoman.’ (Kinsella, *Remember Me* 243)

Her husband tries to explain to her she is a real businesswoman with the attitude belonging to this position, therefore her employees call her the cobra. It seems that because she is a woman it is harder to accept her behaviour as a boss for both male and female colleagues. Indirectly this implies that it is easier to accept authoritative directions from a man than from a woman.

As neither of the other female characters has a male character under her supervision it is hard to apply the familial model to them. However, something can be said about the way men deal with women that have a similar or lower position. For example, Jojo in *The Other Side of the Story* is a literary agent. She has the exact same job as her colleague Richie Grant, and they both compete for the position as new partner of the company. If one has to put a familial label on it, it would be a brother-sister relationship as they have equal positions, so in theory also equal opportunities. The fact that Richie eventually gets the partnership is completely in line with it as boys tend to win from girls in many areas. He does not have problems with it whatsoever and does not let an opportunity go by to tell Jojo. Jojo on the other hand is furious and is not able to accept that she is not chosen to be the new partner. The fact that the board consisted only of men did not help her position as they still see women as the weaker sex.

In sum, it can be said that the familial model is rather useless when it comes to chick-lit novels. The main reason for being that most of the women do not have a leading position in the company they work and in these cases there are no problems with authority anyway. However, the excerpt from *Remember Me* implies it is hard, for both men and women, to deal with women in leading positions.

## Conclusion

Analysis of the novels has indicated that all women have jobs. As the type of jobs vary and not all of them have careers some would say that chick-lit supports the backlash movement. However, this seems to go a bit far because women in the backlash did not work at all. The low number of women with an actual career is seemingly part of present day society and as most women like their job the way it is it should be said that the girl power movement is represented. This is especially supported by the fact that most jobs and careers progress during the novel.

The fact that it is hard for male characters to accept a female supervisor implies that it is still hard for males to accept female authority. Furthermore, the lack of females in leading positions implies that the backlash is also still visible in career opportunities of women in chick-lit novels.

## Conclusion

This thesis has researched objectification, gender relations, and career possibilities in chick-lit novels within the theoretical framework postfeminism. The rather difficult concept postfeminism can be defined in four different ways: conservative backlash, girl power, third wave feminism, and poststructuralist feminism. In this case only two of them are relevant, conservative backlash and girl power. Defining postfeminism as a conservative backlash implies that it goes back to standards from before second wave feminism. If chick-lit is connected to a concept with a definition like that it suggests that these novels are rather anti-feminist. Girl power on the other hand stresses female individuality and independence, but also accepts the portrayal of female sexuality, which some see as part of the backlash and others as a progressive approach of second wave ideas. Connecting chick-lit novels with girl power implies that the novels are not as anti-feminist as the backlash suggests, but neither as feminist as the ideas of second wave feminists. The central aim of this thesis was to determine how the tension between the conservative backlash and the girl power movement, both used to define postfeminism, shape the representation of objectification, gender relations, and career opportunities in chick-lit novels. Each of the chapters, one on each concept, has already shown some general conclusion, but these will be explained in more detail below.

To give a proper conclusion on the tensions between these two movements it is important to establish which ideas belong to which movement. Naturally, many things have been mentioned throughout the thesis but in this paragraph they are all put together to give a clear overview for the conclusions that are made later on in this chapter. The core for all ideas about the two movements within postfeminism, in this thesis, are the ideas by second-wave-feminists. According to Sally Haslanger and Nancy Tuana the focus of second-wave-feminists was on equal rights. Not only political rights, but equal rights in the areas of “education, the workplace, and at home.” In other words, they note that the movement wanted the same political rights as men, which they already partly got during the first wave of feminism. Furthermore, they want equal rights in education. Women should be able to attend all levels and types of education. It should no longer be able to reject someone on the basis of sex. Moreover, equal rights at the workplace involve several things. First of all, feminists wanted equal payment for men and women. Next to this they wanted equality of job opportunities, women should no longer just be hired for low-level jobs, but do the same jobs as men. Women should no longer be treated as submissive housewives; they themselves should get the power over the reproduction. Most important for equality at home is the lack of sexualisation

of the women. A woman should not be treated as a sexual object as this only gives men more power though there are women who exploit this to manipulate men.

These things mean that a lack of education in the area a woman preferred, no job or a low-paid job without any perspective of improvement, sexual oppression or more general objectification are signs of the conservative backlash. These are, thus, also the things that were taken into account when analysing the novels. For girl power a similar list can be made. A job that makes a woman independent and treated as an individual without sexual oppression would then be the ideal view of the movement following the second-wavers, which in this case would be the girl power movement.

Objectification has a rather large role in the novels. Especially the items denial of subjectivity and appearance are represented extensively. As objectification merely has to do with male dominance and suppression of women it is not surprising that these items indicate exactly that. However, reduction to appearance can be seen as sexual oppression, which clearly belongs to the backlash as second-wave-feminists fought to gain equality between the sexes in this area. It is a conservative idea to judge women on their appearance, however it still happens, which is probably why it is visible in the novels as well. Denial of subjectivity can also be seen as shaped by the backlash as it undermines women's feelings, which are rather important to supporters of girl power. As denial of subjectivity only tends to come about in work related situations it can be concluded that the labour market is not always ready to deal with female feelings and experiences, while men can perfectly handle them at home. Denial of autonomy is partly in line with denial of subjectivity. It also goes back to the backlash as in these instances men take control over women, while these women themselves are perfectly capable of making their own decisions, in other words, their independence is denied. In contrast with the former item, denial of autonomy appears in both the private sphere and work related sphere. Although reduction to body is a rather important item which occurs a noticeable amount of times it is hard to speak of objectification on these occasions as the women, most of the times, they objectify themselves. They use their sexuality and at the same time take control over it so nothing happens that they do not have in control, but that they still get what they want. In this example, the influence of the girl power movement is clearly visible. Although some feminists believe 'selling' your body is part of the backlash, in this thesis it is assumed as something positive belonging to the independence and confidence of women. Last but not least, silencing which is influenced by both definitions of postfeminism. One side of the story is that women are sometimes silenced at work. Again this is a thing that no longer should happen and belongs to the backlash. It belongs to the backlash

because of its denial of female intellect, and because it clearly indicates that there are no equal rights at the labour market yet. On the other hand, most of the novels have a protagonist which tells her story in a first person narrative and all stories have female protagonists. This shows that the female voice is important and her opinions, ideas, and experiences should be told, which would then be the influence of girl power movement on silencing. As a general tendency that can be found in objectification in the novels is that most of it appears in work related situations. It, thus, seems as if men and women have adapted the ideas behind second wave feminism to the private situation, but not to that of the workplace.

The next concept studied closely, gender relations, confirms the idea that changes have taken in the home environment, but not as much in the work related sphere. In relations between male and female characters some changes in the boundaries can be noticed. These changes, no matter how small, indicate that it has become more acceptable for women to take on some masculine features and do things that used to belong to men. Although male dominance has not disappeared completely from the private sphere it is far less than in a situation belonging to the backlash. Male-female relations at work are a totally different story as some women are still dominated by men on the work floor. Sexual harassment, ignorance, and bullying are signs the novels have not yet moved away from the conservative backlash. These are just the signs on the surface. A more detailed examination shows that women are discriminated against because they might want children and need to go on maternity leave. When it comes to relations between females things are slightly different. No real changes take place in the private spheres, even though, the relations have changed after the second wave of feminism. A feature from the girl power movement that seems to be important is to support each other in all aspects of their private lives, no matter if these relations are between family members or friends, and sometimes even strangers. This support more than once lacks in work related relations between female characters. Instead of supporting each other in their fight for equal rights on the labour market they fight each other. The reason behind this is envy because one woman admires the job of the other and this sometimes turns into a battle about this job. Although it might seem weird in the first place, this can also be ascribed to be an aspect of girl power. During the period in which the same rules and ideas of the conservative backlash applied women did not work at all or did low-paid jobs. The fact that they entered the labour market and are competing with each other to get a better job in itself is, thus, a good thing. In contrast with objectification, which seemed to have been influenced more by the conservative backlash, the gender relations in the novels merely seem influenced by aspects of the girl power movement. However, this does not mean that there is no male



domination at all because the relation between male and female characters at work remains a considerable problem, which has to be solved before complete equality is possible.

Work is an important item in both the concepts objectification and gender relations, but it is also a concept worth discussing on its own. As all main female characters have a job it would be weird to say that this part of the novels is influenced by the backlash. However, as not all women have flourishing careers there is something to say about a feeling that this is an aspect of the backlash. Because the jobs the women have are not at very low levels and they enjoy them this actually is a bridge to far and in this thesis at least it is considered to be influenced by the girl power idea. This is supported by the fact that not all jobs are female oriented. Although a great number of protagonists has a job related to either beauty or the publishing world, there are also exceptions and it does not seem that women in chick-lit novels have more female oriented jobs than women in the non-fictional world. Another point that supports the idea is the progress the women make in their jobs during the story. Women with a career get a promotion or reach another level with their career through hard work, while the women with 'normal' jobs in a way tend to get a bit more challenges. The familial model which seemed a great way to discuss the hierarchy at the companies the heroines of the novels work turned out to be a rather useless model as only one instance was suitable to apply it to. However, this does not mean the model did not give any useful results. The fact that it was only applicable indicated that there are hardly any women in leading positions, or at least not supervising men. This might be influenced by the backlash movement as according to chick-lit novels women would have the same rights and opportunities as men. Like gender relations job opportunities seem to be influenced more by girl power than backlash. However, it remains hard for women to get a top-position, which does not mean they cannot have a flourishing career on a slightly lower level.

An analysis of the concepts objectification, gender relations, and career opportunities in the novels has resulted in the conclusion that the tension between the conservative backlash and the girl power movement makes that elements of both movements are visible on all levels of the novels. All novels contain some negative aspects that are part of the backlash and some positive aspects that are related to girl power. In general it can be said that the ideas derived from the girl power movement predominate. An exception is the area of objectification which contains more influences from the conservative backlash. However, the influences in that area by girl power are very strong and might outweigh the ideas by the conservative backlash. Something that comes forward in the analysis of all three concepts is that the situations at work are always more connected with the backlash than situations in the home environment.

Women are more objectified at, as well as more dominated and not treated equally to male colleagues, and although they sometimes do have careers they hardly have a leading position in which they have male subordinates. In the case they have it is a real struggle and behaviour that is seen as normal for a male businessman is taken far less serious if a female behaves like it.

Aside from these conclusions on the novels as a whole there are also some things that can be said about the novels in relation to the authors. Although all novels contain objectification, stereotypical problems with gender relations, and unequal career opportunities it seems as if the novels by Rachel Gibson contain just a little more influences of the backlash than the other novels. Her protagonists have to deal with objectification that is a degree higher than that of the other heroines. Furthermore, all her novels are written in a third person narrative which undermines the female voice. Last but not least, none of her protagonists has a career and the jobs they have are all female oriented and belong to the lowest in rank of the jobs in all the novels. Gibson's novels, which are classified as chick-lit, sometimes tend to lean more towards romance novels for which these things are more suitable. The novels by Marian Keyes and Sophie Kinsella, on the other hand, are clearly chick-lit novels and have a fair amount of girl power influences as well as backlash ones. As both the influences of backlash and girl power are visible in the novels it seems a rather truthful reflection of real life, which is the aim of the novels. If the novels only portrayed aspects of the girl power movement it would be less realistic and the genre would probably not be as popular as it now is.

Research on chick-lit novels is limited and this thesis attempts to give a little more insight into the genre and its relation with postfeminism. Due to limits in length and scope this thesis has only been focussing on a total of nine novels by three different authors. For further research it would be prudent to research more novels by more authors in relation to the same theories to see if the results of this thesis are consistent. Furthermore, the theory on gender relations is rather dated, but chosen with care for this thesis. However, it would be relevant to shed another light on the subject with a more modern theory and compare these results. Other options are to focus on completely different subjects within the area of postfeminism such as consumerism. For now this thesis contributes to the increasing interest in both postfeminism and chick-lit novels.

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