



## **Dedications**

*To*

*My parents*

*My sisters*

*My family*

*My best friends*

***Houda***

*In memory of my Father, Khelifi Naceur, may he rest in peace*

*To my Mother, Brothers and Sisters*

*To all my friends Kouki, Sonia and Dyhia*

***Kenza***

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**Abstract:**

*This research is a comparative study of Lauren Weisberger's novel *The Devil Wears Prada* (2003) and Christina Chiu's *Beauty* (2020). The study has focused on how society puts too much pressure on women to fit the 'beauty myth' which is to be physically attractive, good mothers, and perfect housewives. The main concern of the work has been to demonstrate how women are affected by this 'beauty myth' in two different societies the American and the Asian. In order to achieve our aim which is how Images of Beauty are used against women in two different societies; the American and the Asian, we have adopted Naomi Wolf's theory of the beauty myth as exposed in her eponymous book *The Beauty Myth* (1991), a feminist literary theory that focuses on how societies control women and maintain patriarchy by demeaning them and setting expectations for how they should behave and what they should look like. The study is divided into two chapters. The first one deals with the social pressure on women while the second treats the effects of this pressure on women and their reaction to it. It has been revealed that women in both novels are denied the right to live and choose what is appropriate for them and instead, have to live the way society wants them. It has also been shown that some women finally break the myth that is set by society and decide to follow their inner voice and build strong identities independent of social conventions of the patriarchal system. Since people's opinions of beauty change throughout time, it has been discovered that the concept of beauty does as well.*

**Key Words:** *Social standards, Beauty, Perfection, Women, The beauty myth.*

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## **Introduction:**

The present dissertation is a contribution to the field of comparative literature. It is a study that compares the affinities between the two novels, written by two prominent American and Asian writers; namely: *The Devil Wears Prada* (2003) by Lauren Weisberger, and *Beauty* (2020) by Christina Chiu. Our main goal is to explore how women are raised to meet the heavy demands that society has placed on them, and how images of beauty pressure them. To do so, this work's theoretical framework has relied on Naomi Wolf's (1991) *The Beauty Myth : How Images of Beauty are used against Women* .

In both American and Asian societies an ideal woman is expected to be successful in both her job and her personal life. She should be able to work and care for her family, for example, cleaning, cooking meals, caring for children and her spouse. In addition, the ideal woman is expected to be a multifaceted individual who can successfully balance her professional and family life. The society examines her appearance, weight, and fashion sense as well. This means that being beautiful is another physical trait that women are expected to possess. However, expecting women to attain all these qualities increases pressure on them. In this regard, IvyPanda (2019), which is an online blog has posted an essay entitled 'An Ideal Woman in The Contemporary Society' suggests ; "A woman is expected to be competitive in her career, but she is criticized for neglecting her family and delegating her roles to helpers."

Moreover, beauty is a social standard that is valued in both American and Asian cultures. It is frequently characterized in terms of hairstyle, skin tone, body type, and other physical characteristics. One must fulfill those requirements in order to be considered beautiful. It is thought that meeting all of the aforementioned requirements gives one a perfect image. Unfortunately, meeting these norms can be costly because it damages women's self-esteem, which poses a serious threat to their health and general well-being. As a result, women

constantly try to alter their physical characteristics and personalities in order to please themselves and others and to fit in with their communities, where being beautiful is essential.

Additionally, women alter their reality to reach high social expectations by getting married young, starting families early, and being good housewives. However, beauty and the other standards should be about respect and value and the right to exist without having to alter who women fundamentally are. In relation to this an online blog named Planed Parenthood (2023) has published an essay entitled ‘What are Gender Roles and Stereotupes ’ which argues that “girls and women are generally expected to dress in typically feminine ways and be polite, accommodating, and nurturing.”As a result, when we concentrate more on how women are supposed to look, we can comprehend why they could think it would be a good idea to change their appearance or flaws.

The American novelist Lauren Weisberger and the Asian-American writer Christina Chiu are among the authors who have dealt with such issues in their novels respectively *The Devil Wears Prada* (2003) and *Beauty* (2020). In this work we intend to explore the social pressure on women in both Lauren Weisberger’s *The Devil Wears Prada* and Christina Chiu’s *Beauty*. The novels are good examples that show how social standards are used against women. This will be done by relying on Naomi wolf’s theory *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty are used Against Women* (1991).

### **Review of Literature:**

This section reviews a selection of the literature that has been written in relation to *The Devil Wears Prada* (2003) by Lauren Weisberger and *Beauty* (2020) by Christina Chiu. We have selected the most relevant articles and critiques.

In fact, Lauren Weisberger's *The Devil Wears Prada* and Christina Chiu's *Beauty* have been the focus of many critics in the recent years. to begin with "Rohwani Surhman" who reviewed Weisberger's work *The Devil Wears Prada*. Rohwani Surahman argues that Weisberger's work is considered as a portrayal of life. It pictures how the underestimation of women in society happens. The imbalance has been clear between the assistant Andrea and her boss Miranda. Miranda Priestly intimidates Andrea psychologically. She affirmed that Andrea is somehow not allowed to do her job peacefully. "Andrea is always haunted by Miranda's demanding call" (Rohwani Surahman, 2011, p. 7). It is clear that Miranda is a very tough boss, as she makes Andrea's job unnecessarily difficult and consuming. Additionally, the same study added that society's high standards expectations are what put women always in a weak position. They seek for change because of the prejudices they get from people around them. In the study Rohwani Surahman declares that, Andrea is also forced to wear high fashioned items, like high-heeled shoes and leather pants in which she feels uncomfortable. These unwritten rules are imposed on her because of her position.

In another study, Angela McQuay states that Andrea battles to fit in with a new environment and maintain her sanity throughout her time at the magazine. "Andrea as a character is interesting and easy to relate to as she struggles to both fit into a world she is a stranger to and keep her sanity"(McQuay, 2003, p. 2). Because of Miranda's disrespectful behavior, Andrea hates her job but she continues doing it to get her dream job later. The critic says:

Miranda Priestly expects her assistants to work fourteen-hours doing menial jobs such as making sure her coffee is the right temperature and wrapping Christmas gifts. To make matters worse, Miranda is ungrateful, rude, spoiled, and does not accept her employees, especially her assistants, making any mistakes (Ibid. p2).

From the above quotation we understand that Miranda Priestly demands that her helpers work fourteen-hour a day, doing many tasks like wrapping Christmas presents, and making sure her coffee is the appropriate temperature.

As far as Christina Chiu is concerned, we can state some critics that were concerned with her and her novel *Beauty*. Among them, we find Helen Benedict who sheds light on how Christina Chiu's *Beauty* portrays fearlessly how love integrity and creativity can shape a world and bring wisdom. Helen Benedict argues that *Beauty* is a story of a woman's journey through loss, trauma and disappointment to self-acceptance and healing. The protagonist of the story Amy Wong, faces several difficulties in her life. Helen Benedict claims that the protagonist of the novel is under pressure of all people around her, "She is a person whose strength is hidden even from herself. As she navigates a life in a fashion industry, Amy struggles with expectations heaped on her by her family, a string of bad -news men, and world skewed by sexism and racism and so." (Benedict, 2020) In other words, Amy finds herself battling against her family, a succession of awful men and also against a racist and sexist society while navigating in the fashion industry. *Beauty* pictures Amy as a person who deals with the different struggles life sends to her way, from the demands of her professional life to those of her personal ones.

In addition to the previous study, a blog at Wordpress.com argue that in Christina Chiu's *Beauty*, the primary character Amy Wong develops and shifts radically from adolescence to managing family issues after her admission as a woman into the exclusive New York fashion world. She knew how to face and pass all the difficulties that come with her life change, especially the professional level. Furthermore, despite all the obstacles she had confronted, she remained unflinching and revolting against her own mother.

In 'Women's Review of Books' an article entitled "*The Eye*" by Heather Hewett says that Amy's experience confirms what has increasingly been difficult to ignore, the blames and sexual assaults that can happen to anyone. The reviewer states that "Amy must learn to contend with men who wish to control her body and her life, rejecting the shame and low selfworth that began in her childhood. She must find a way back to her own joy for fashion, her desire to create beautiful clothes, and her ability to love and trust herself"(Hewett, 2020). This shows how Amy

learns to deal with men who control her body and her life. In order to recover her passion of a designer, as well as her capacity to love and trust herself, she also learns to set aside the shame and low self-esteem she developed as a young girl.

### **Issue and Working Hypotheses:**

Through the review of the literature, we have noticed that many critics have dealt with Lauren Weinberger's *The Devil Wears Prada* (2003) and Christina Chiu's *Beauty* (2020) from different perspectives. However, both works have been treated and investigated separately. To our best knowledge, no research or study has so far ventured to put them together. Additionally, it has rarely been mentioned before how women defy social norms.

Our concern through this study is to find the common aspects that bind the two works together by focusing on the way both authors depict the social pressure put on women and how the latter handled it. The two authors have different backgrounds : American and Asian cultural backgrounds and geographic American and Asian origins. Yet they have something in common ; they have both dealt with women issues in societies. As a result, the purpose of this dissertation is to demonstrate how social standards of perfection and beauty are imposed on the female characters in the two novels.

In fact, social standards can be considered as a double-edged sword. On the one hand, they are celebrated by those who have the privilege to have them. On the other hand, they are a burden for the less fortunate who do not fulfill all the requirements of what is perceived as perfect. Even though women carry the burden that society imposes on them, this does not stop them from revolting against them, learning from them and reclaiming themselves to find their self-worth in a place where the need for perfection is greatest.

## **Methodological Outline:**

This work is a significant comparative study of the two literary works *The Devil Wears Prada* (2003) by Lauren Wiesberger and *Beauty* (2020) by Christina Chiu utilizing Naomi Wolf's *The Beauty Myth* (1991) theory. It follows the IMRAD method, starting by an introduction which highlights the issue of how women have endured all the standards imposed by society. It also includes how women get affected by these standards. It is then followed by a literary review where we have provided some critics that studied the two works, the Issues and Working Hypotheses this section presents our issues and our claims. Then following section is the 'methods and materials' section which is divided into two parts; the 'Methods' section which includes important concepts of the theory used. Next comes the 'Materials' section that covers the biographies of the two authors and the synopses of the two novels, then we will present ur results. As for the 'Discussion' it will be divided into two chapters. The first chapter focuses on the social pressure on women, while the second one discusses the effects of social standards on women and their reactions to them. The work will end with a conclusion that will focus on restating the key points that highlight the significant similarities between the two novels.

## **II. Methods and Materials:**

### **A- Methods:**

This section of our research paper is devoted to the theoretical framework that will be used in our research. We intend to study the burden of beauty standards on females in *The Devil Wears Prada* by Lauren Weinberger and *Beauty* by Christina Chiu by relying on Naomi Wolf's theory *The Beauty Myth* published in 1991.

### **A-Naomi Wolf's Theory of *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty Are Used against Women (1991)***

Naomi Wolf is an American feminist scholar, also considered as a leading spokeswoman of what has been described as the third wave of the feminist movement. She is the writer of *The Beauty Myth*. The latter deals with the pressure put on women to change who they are, especially physically to reach high social standards. It also highlights the effects the latter have on the well-being of women. The main focus of this theory is that beauty standards are just a way for societies to control women and maintain patriarchy, by putting women down and judging them by their appearances. "An ideology that makes women feel "worth-less" was urgently needed to counteract the way feminism has begun to make us feel worth more." (Wolf, 1991, p. 18) The quotation means that all social standards are just created to devalue women's worth.

#### **a- Beauty Obsession at Work:**

Naomi Wolf also states that societies' expectations extend to reach women at the work place. In other words, she exposes how women are expected to appear and act at work. In fact, even recruitment is based on women's physical appearance. As they are often underestimated

in terms of capacities, just because of the way they look. In relation to this, Naomi Wolf claims: “A woman looks like a million dolla-rs, she is a first class beauty, her face is her fortune.”(Wolf,1991, p.20) In other words, in society’s eyes, the first thing that is taken into consideration when evaluating the worth of women is whether their face matches a certain degree of attractiveness or not. The value of beauty can even be auctioned for money, and the more beautiful the face is, the more expensive it would be.

According to Naomi Wolf the beauty myth is harmful because it keeps women isolated, and in a constant competition. It also creates a lack of solidarity which affects women economically. Women, at some work places, have often been underestimated, contrary to men as “The job market refined the beauty myth as a way to legitimize employment discrimination against women.”(Wolf, 1991, p. 21). This means that beauty is more important to women than men in the work place.

Additionally, Naomi Wolf, states that women get affected mentally when they start feeling bad about their looks which may lead to a serious risk of suffering from different complexes, as low self-esteem and eating disorder by starving themselves to get the ideal body. Along with that, it causes depression and anxiety, a phenomenon that has been rising in recent years.

### **B-Beyond the Beauty Myth:**

Wolf’s also focuses on how to become aware of the myth, to eliminate the construct that benefits man economically at the work place. This myth keeps women weak and divided and “a woman’s appearance is more often called to her attention for a political reason than as a constituent of genuine attraction and desire.”(Ibid, p, 280).This means that The physical attractiveness of a woman is more frequently discussed for political reasons than as a factor in real attraction and desire.The effects of the beauty myth do not only hurt women emotionally but also have an obvious impact on their health.

Recent research consistently shows that inside the majority of the West's controlled, attractive, successful working women, there is a secret "underlife" poisoning our freedom; infused with notions of beauty. It is a dark vein of self-hatred, physical obsessions, terror of aging, and dread of lost control"(Wolf,1991,p.10)

This ideal of attainable beauty is maintained in order to make women weak and helpless. Being aware of the beauty myth and fighting its strict beauty standards are the only ways to win.

Maybe the less pain women inflict on our bodies, the more beautiful our bodies will look to us. Perhaps we will forget to elicit admiration from strangers, and find we don't miss it; perhaps we will await our older faces with anticipation, and be unable to see our bodies as a mass of imperfections, since there is nothing on us that is not precious. Maybe we won't want to be the after anymore. (Ibid,p,291)

This means that Naomi Wolf believes that perhaps the less suffering we put on our bodies, the more beautiful they will appear.

## **B-Materials:**

### **1-The Biography of Lauren Weisberger:**

Lauren Weisberger was born on March 28<sup>th</sup>,1977 in Scranton, Pennsylvania in the United States of America. After her parents' divorce at the age of 11, she moved to Allentown Pennsylvania with her mother and sister. It is worth mentioning that Weisberger's first job was an assistant to the editor in chief at Vogue Magazine. As she was working there, she began writing her first book *The Devil Wears Prada*. This indicates that Miranda Priestly is based on a real life person Anna Wintour. The real story is that Lauen Weisberger worked as an assistant for a very tough boss at Vogue Magazine, Anna Wintour, where she has spent very hard times while working. *The Devil Wears Prada* was published on April 2003 and has spent six months on the New York bestseller list.

Weisberger is also the author of many other works such as *Where the Grass Is Green* (2021) and *The Girls Are Pretty* (2021). Lauren Weisberger has written *The Devil Wears Prada* to visualize the exploitation and alienation that she experienced in her life, through her character

Andrea who experiences alienation from her boss, and fights against it to free herself. It is just the same way Lauren Weisberger did with her boss Anna Wintour editor in chief at Vogue Magazine.

## **2- The Biography of Christina Chiu:**

Christina Chiu, an American brilliant writer, born on February 13<sup>th</sup>, 1969 in New York City. She is the Daughter of Yim and Paul Chiu. She is graduated from Columbia University. The Asian writer worked in Tin House Magazine as an assistant. She is winner of James Alan Mcpherson Award for her novel *Beauty*, also Kirkus best of 2020. She is also winner of the Asian American Award for book *Troublemaker and Other Saints*( 2002). She loved writing since she was in high school; she used to write for her college newspaper. Christina Chiu wrote one of her famous books entitled *Beauty* in which she shares some of her common experiences.

Like the protagonist of *Beauty* (2020), Chiu also faced some difficulties through her journey of becoming a writer. Like her fictional character Amy, she was also fighting for herself and her son. Which means that the story of her book *Beauty* is based on areal story. Furthermore, Christina has illustrated a part of her personal life in one of her chapters entitled “A Closet to Eternity” in which she re-experiences the memories she had with her grandmother through her protagonist Amy towards the end of the story .Christina Chiu is also the founder of the Asian American Writers Workshop, and has worked in the fashion industry as a shoe designer.

## **3- Synopsis of *The Devil Wears Prada*:**

*The Devil Wears Prada* is a book written by Lauren Weisberger in 2003 by the Broadway Book, New York city. It tells the first professional experience of a young woman, named Andrea such whose greatest dream is to become a journalist. However, she ends up getting a job in a magazine. The latter is not just any one but the well-known magazine “Runway”, to work as Miranda Priestley’s assistant. She accepts that position because

Miranda is known for using her connections to promote her assistants within a year of service. So, Andrea is hoping that taking the low paying assistant position would help her advance in her profession.

Andrea is unprepared for the toxic environment she is entering because she has never heard of Miranda or “Runway”. Miranda is depicted as a spoiled narcissist who wants her helpers to serve her all the time. Andrea’s meeting with her boss turns into an all-consuming experience, and she begins to disregard her family, best friend Lily, and her boyfriend Alex. Everyone in her life is concerned with the idea that the job is affecting her health and happiness as well.

In her job, Andrea is enduring her colleagues’ constant criticism because of her appearance. She is supposed to dress in a certain way that she finds uncomfortable. Since she represents “Runway” she has to follow some unwritten rules such as wearing haute couture. She also struggles with the obligation of watching her weight all the time, as she is not allowed to have any junk food or anything that contains fat. Those are also some examples of work demands she has to accomplish. Andrea ignores the danger of being too much devoted to Miranda as she thinks that the current job will get her closer to her dream job. She has lost all perspective of her priorities and what is important in life.

During their stay in Paris at the spring fashion show, Andrea hears from her mother about the serious accident that her best friend had. The ultimate straw is Miranda's apathy to the catastrophe. Thus Andrea decided to abandon everything and resign from her position. Back in New York, she seeks out a new route for herself, the one that is free of Miranda's temptations. Finally, Andrea’s journey in “Runway” to get her dream job comes to an end. Andrea decides to leave her job in order to avoid becoming like her boss Miranda.

#### **4- The Synopsis of *Beauty*:**

Published in 2020, Christina Chiu's *Beauty* is a novel set around the fashion industry. It tells the story of a creative and interesting Asian woman called Amy Wong, who goes to work in a fashion industry and ends up having complications with her family's expectations, as well as her personal and professional life. This makes her goal of becoming a fashion designer quite difficult.

She was abandoned by her father at the age of 16 and discarded by her mother a few years afterwards. As a consequence, Amy finds herself in a situation she is unsure how to manage. Time jumps to the day Amy goes to a fashion party with her best friend Ben. Being jobless and financially tight, Amy decides to get the knowledge of Jeff Jones. The latter is one of the most famous fashion designers in New York. Amy's intention is first to be offered a job by him. However, Jeff, being attracted by her, proposes to marry her. Afterwards, the two marry and Amy becomes pregnant. She has her first son Alex who unfortunately had a serious accident which damaged his brain. Consequently, instead of stepping into her dream of working on a fashion industry, Amy struggles to keep the balance between her duty of motherhood and her job, especially after her divorce.

After her struggle in her new life to regain control and choices of her life, Amy divorces for the second time, because of her husband's behavior and treatment. Thanks to her failed marriages, she becomes aware of her self-worth, and gives all her interest to her children and herself. The novel ends with Amy's realization of the fact that all what matters is to live her life, and be beautiful the way she wants to be. Christina Chiu concludes the story with a note of hope. Societies keep putting pressure on women, in order to fit the ideal image of a beautiful woman, good mother and housewife. Women find a source of strength throughout a journey to proclaim themselves and their beauty, which begins when they start to embrace their imperfections and vulnerabilities.

## **Results:**

The present dissertation is an attempt to compare two novels authored by two female writers. The two novels are *The Devil Wears Prada* (2003), by Lauren Weisberger and *Beauty* (2020) by Christina Chiu. Despite their belonging to two different cultural backgrounds, both Lauren Weisberger and Christina Chiu have tackled the same subjects. Both writers emphasize the fact that society pressures women to reach a certain standard of beauty and perfection. They also show how women after all resist these social standards and find their true self. Our comparison focuses on how social standards affect women and how they trap them in the work place, and finally how they come to terms with the fact that their self-worth is unrelated to these deceptive notions.

After discussing the two chapters of the research paper, we have come to the conclusion that the burden of social standards is what causes women to develop the condition known as "beauty obsession" and seeking for perfection, which is an obsession with one's appearance and attitude. This occurs when women get influenced by others' opinions about them and thus start to put more emphasis on how they should appear and behave instead of emphasizing their moral characteristics like intelligence or talent.

Lauren Weisberger's *The Devil Wears Prada* (2003) and Christina Chiu's *Beauty* (2020) show the major characters Andrea Such and Amy Wong individually. On one hand, Andrea feels uneasy at work because of the opinions of her coworkers and supervisor. She receives criticism for not being skinny and attractive. On the other hand, Amy Wong is disappointed to see that she has not developed into the woman her mother has envisioned for her. Amy still feels inadequate and unable to live up to her conventionally held family standards. So according to both authors, women are victimized by society's image of the beauty myth, the fact which hurts women and forces them to alter their reality.

Another significant finding from our investigation is that some women finally learn to reject the myth of the ideal woman. They grow self-assured in their ability to attain their full potential as individuals, by relying on their inner qualities. Additionally, women learn to accept that it is more important for them to function well where they appear rather than how they look like. Through her character Andrea in *The Devil Wears Prada*, Lauren Weisberger illustrates how women resist the illusion of the ideal beauty. When Andrea decides to go back to her true self at the end of the story, it best exemplifies the power she receives from the experience.

It is concluded that Andrea no longer wears branded clothing, since she has completely returned to being herself. Similarly, with her character Amy Wong, Christina Chiu has also provided examples of how women reject the concept of beauty and acknowledge their value. Amy's confidence has been regained thanks to her ability to alter her perspective and take charge of her life. Understanding how to accept and love oneself and be the person one has chosen to be is the most important lesson she has learnt. Beauty standards in society change over time, and people who love their appearance more than their moral character can never be satisfied. Thus, many people experience low self-esteem as a result of being concerned with the ideal physique. Moreover, changing your perspective is the first step on the path to selfrealization, and by doing so, you will change your life as well.

## **IV- Discussion:**

This section analyses the burden of the imposed social standards on women as pictured by the two feminist writers Lauren Weisberger through her book *The Devil Wears Prada* (2003), and Christina Chiu by her novel *Beauty* (2020). Both writers attempt to demonstrate how social standards are used to oppress women and how they force them to alter their realities by modifying their external appearance. Weisberger and Chiu discuss how women get hurt because of the amount of pressure that is put on them to change the way they act, behave and especially look like wherever they appear, even in the work place. The first chapter of this work focuses on social pressure on women, and how they are trapped in beauty obsession. The second one will deal with the effects of social standards on women and their reactions against them.

### **Chapter One: The Social Pressure on Women in Lauren Weisberger's *The Devil Wears Prada* and Christina Chiu's *Beauty*.**

#### **1-The Social Pressure on Women in Lauren Weisberger's in *The Devil Wears Prada*:**

Social standards are just a way to put pressure on women to change who they are, especially physically to reach the perfect image of a woman drawn by society. These standards have negatives effects on the well- being of women. It has always been a great problem to women in their work place. A lot of writers have described and written about such experience, as it is the case of Lauren Weisberger in her book *The Devil Wears Prada* and Christina Chiu's *Beauty*.

#### **a-Social Expectations on Women At Work in *The Devil Wears Prada* :**

Lauren Weisberger tries to mirror the way women are judged in the work place in relation to their physical appearance, and how they quickly adapt to the situation and change their looks to please themselves and people around them. She does so by her main character

Andrea to show how a woman can be treated in her work place and how she can change her style just to fit in. In chapter one, Weisberger suggests:

I had known the minute I stepped on the Runway floor that I didn't belong. My clothes and hair were wrong for sure, but more glaringly out of place was my attitude. I didn't know anything about fashion and I didn't care at all. And therefore, I had to have it. Besides, a million girls would die for this job. (Weisberger, 2003, p. 19)

From the quotation, it is obvious that Andrea starts worrying about her appearance even though she is aware of her abilities. She feels uncomfortable in her skin when she has seen what kind of women she has found in Runway. Comparing to her, they are different humans.

This confirms that even while working, women are still expected to look attractive.

Naomi Wolf states in her book that "A woman looks like a million dollars, she's a firstclass beauty, her face is her fortune" (Wolf, 1991, p. 20). This means that women must always achieve a level of beauty and be physically presentable at work, if they want to succeed.

Weisberger says:

It was at this point that I began to want the job most desperately, in the way people yearn for things they consider unattainable. It might not be akin to getting into law school or having an essay published in a campus journal, but it was, in my starved-for-success mind, a real challenge—a challenge because I was an imposter, and not a very good one at that. (Weisberger, 2003, p. 19)

The quotation indicates clearly that Andrea is fully aware of what is awaiting her as she is certain that she does not fit at the Magazine. Nevertheless, she is ready to take the challenge. She knows well that by accepting the low-paying assistant position, she would sacrifice many things but would certainly advance in her career.

Before meeting Miranda Priestly, Andrea ignores completely how she looks like or anything related to her, even if Miranda has been a well-known celebrity in the field of fashion. This is due to the fact that Andrea has never been interested in fashion. However, the first time.

Andrea sees Miranda Priestley, her attraction and admiration of her physical appearance is overtly shown. Andrea's fear of her boss is also displayed through her uneasiness and discomfort while being in front of her. She "felt comfortable enough to claim one of the uncomfortable black chairs that faced her and she notes that all the time Miranda is scrutinizing her "intently, mentally" (Weisberger, 2003, p. 18). We can relate Miranda's tough nature to the fact that she is elegantly dressed in expensive and branded clothes which gives her self-confidence and reassurance.

Andrea has described Miranda as a glamorous, thin woman, with a flawless skin. In addition to this, Andrea has mentioned one of Miranda's personality traits when she said "the monotone of her statements told me more than all of her word" (Ibid, p.16) Miranda's impatience and intolerance start affecting Andrea, as she panics and stresses out every time she gets a demanding call from Miranda. Moreover, she is obliged to work for long hours. Her official working time finishes at 10 p.m, but she is not allowed to go home until midnight, and should come before every one the next day.

In chapter one, Andrea describes how she feels each time she gets a call from her boss, saying "My cell phone bleated loudly"(Ibid, p.3). She gets terrified each time she knows that it is Miranda who is calling. "Ahn-dre-ah! Ahn-dre-ah! Hey, Ahn-dre-ah, do you hear me?" (Ibid p.3). It is clear from the above quotation that Andrea feels stressed and oppressed by her boss. She also shows how much she panics and feels anxious as a result of Miranda's impatience and intolerance.

Moreover, perfection is clear and present everywhere in "Runway", all the people who work for Miranda fit the place. Unlike Andrea they are elegant, pretty and skinny. They look just the way they are expected to look like. The employees of Miranda seem like they belong there, and fit nicely with the environment. This confirms that in the world of fashion, only particular types of women are represented. "What is happening today is that all the professions

into which women are making strides are being rapidly reclassified so far as the women in them are concerned as display professions. Beauty is being categorized.” (Wolf, 1991, p. 27). As a way of illustration, we can say the Beauty Myth is cultivated by commercials and other visual marketing. In chapter three, Weisberger states:

Fifteen, sixteen, and finally finally ! seventeen, where the doors opened to reveal a group of Runway fashion assistants on their way to pick up the cigarettes, Diet Coke, and mixed greens that would constitute their lunch. Each young, beautiful face looked more panicked than the next, and they almost trampled one another trying to move out of Miranda’s way. They parted directly down the middle, three to one side and two to the other, and she deigned to walk past them. They were all staring after her, silent, as she made her way across the reception area, and I was left with no choice but to follow her. Wouldn’t notice a thing, I figured. We’d just spent what felt like an entire insufferable week locked together in a fiveby- three-foot box, and she hadn’t so much as acknowledged my presence. (Weisberger, 2003, p. 246)

Andrea describes the runway fashion assistants as being gorgeous and beautiful, but at the same time panicked. All what they are allowed to consume is ‘diet coke’ and ‘mixed greens’ to watch their weight and preserve their elegance. This indicates the amount of pressure they are exposed to.

At work, Andrea has to follow some unwritten rules. She must start by watching what she consumes. When she requests fatty meals, people around her stare at her weirdly. In fact, all of the workers of that company keep an eye on their weight. Those are also examples of the demands of the job. Andrea describes a situation that happens to her :

“Do you really need that?” But I brushed my paranoia aside and reminded myself that the woman was simply a cashier in a cafeteria, not a Weight Watchers counselor. Or a fashion editor.

“So. Not many people buying the soup these days,” she said quietly, punching numbers on the register.

“Yeah, I guess not that many people like New England clam chowder, I mumbled, swiping my card and willing her hands to move faster, faster”(Ibid, p.58).

The conversation shows the cashier’s bewilderment and astonishment of Andrea’s request for soup as most people no longer ask for it but instead consume diet food. Thus, when she requests

fatty food, people view her strangely, as she is not expected to ask for such kind of food. Andrea, who is used to eating fatty, junk food, feels like she has to starve herself to fit in and be like the others who are skinny contrary to her. She says:

Occasionally I'd find a tank top or an oversize jacket I could keep, but the fact that everything was in a size zero was a bit of a problem. Mostly we distributed the clothes to anyone with preteen daughters, the only ones who had a shot in hell of actually fitting into the stuff. I pictured little girls with bodies like little boys strutting around in Prada lipstick skirts and slinky Dolce and Gabbana dresses with spaghetti straps. (Weisberger, 2003, p. 219)

Since Andrea's size is larger than everyone in the magazine, we can see from these lines that she is having trouble finding any item to wear. Most clothes are destined to thin women. This illustrates how little attention the fashion industry pays to the full size category of women. As a result, discrimination is evident when it comes to beauty, as women with large bodies are not seen lovely by socially accepted criteria of beauty.

Because of the unwritten restrictions, Andrea is also forced to wear clothes she is uncomfortable with. She narrates how she is getting forced by Emily, Miranda's first assistant to change her shoes before entering to Miranda's office. Emily tells her "No, of course you can't wear those" (Ibid, p.3) Instead, she asks for another pair of shoes for her. Aside from that, high social standards have the power to alter a woman's outlook in life. Andrea experiences discomfort at work as a result of her colleagues' and her boss's comments over her appearance. Naomi Wolf states that "Women's labor for beauty, and the evaluation of women as beauties rather than as workers, issue women each day with metaphors of the real economic injustices that apply to them in the workplace:"(Ibid, p.56). This means a woman receiving comments from her boss and colleagues for not being thin and glamorous makes her feel unworthy every day. Andrea, who is used to hearing positive comments and encouragements from her family and friends for being proud of her, is now being constantly criticized.

In chapter five, Andrea tells how Nigel, the magazine fashion editor, treated her when they first met, somewhere behind her, she heard something. “Get up so I can get a look at you, I say well! Who do we have right here?” (Weisberger, 2003, p. 50). As loudly as one could manage, he roared. “You are beautiful, but too wholesome, and the outfit serves no purpose for you!” (Ibid, p.50).He looked at every inch of her body, moving his eyes up and down.

Nigel is judging Andrea in the presence of Emily who was mocking instead of defending her. No one respects or takes Andrea seriously before she tries to change her look. Instead, they make her job more challenging. For instance, one day Emily starts screaming at Andrea just because she went out for a short period of time. Emily tells her:

But she could’ve called while you were gone and no one would’ve been here to answer the goddamn phone!” she screamed as she slammed the door to our suite. “Our first priority—our only priority—is Miranda Priestly. Period. And if you can’t deal with that, just remember that there are millions of girls who would die for your job. Now check your voice mail. If she called, we’re dead. You’re dead (Ibid, p.59).

The above quotation shows the way Emily treats Andrea. It demonstrates the pressure and stringency Andrea encounters at work. Additionally, Emily is meticulous and works hard to avoid making mistakes, she ever wants Andrea to remain in her job, it is for nothing but secure her trip to Paris for fashion week.

As a matter of fact, even if Emily and the other workers criticize Andrea’s clothes, they are not comfortable in their own clothes too, but wear them just to be good-looking. For instance, Emily does not feel comfortable wearing feminine clothes. When Miranda is not in the office, she wears different clothing but changes as soon as Miranda arrives. Andrea says:

“It was then I noticed that in the four minutes I’d been downstairs, Emily had managed to switch her faded jeans to leather pants and her own funky sneakers to open-toe stilettos.” (Weisberger, 2003, p. 98).This means that like many others at work, Emily is also forced to follow high social standards or “unwritten rules”.

All these facts affect Andrea who finally tries to change her appearance. This confirms Naomi Wolf's statement, "a woman might think that the law will treat her fairly in employment disputes if only she does her part, looks pretty, and dresses femininely" (Wolf, 1991, p. 38). This means that some women believe that they will be treated fairly in the workplace, if they look attractive and dress femininely. Thus, Andrea questions her appearance realizing the value of being elegant at work. She begins to consider what she can do to start looking as a "Runway" worker.

Naomi Wolf has highlighted this point saying that; "With youth and beauty, then, the working woman is visible, but insecure, made to feel her qualities are not unique. But, without them, she is invisible—she falls, literally, "out of the picture."(Ibid, p.34) This implies that, as a working woman, appearance is the only thing that is taken seriously. In chapter ten, Weisberger states:

And so after three months, I surrendered. I just got too tired. Emotionally, physically, mentally, the daily wardrobe ordeal had sapped me of all energy. Until, that is, I relented on the three-month anniversary of my first day. It was a day like any other as I stood with my yellow "I ? Providence" mug in one hand, the other hand rifling through my Abercrombie favorites. Why fight it? I asked myself. Simply wearing their clothes wouldn't necessarily mean I was a total sellout, would it? And besides, the comments on my current wardrobe were becoming more frequent and vicious, and I had begun to wonder if my job was at risk. I looked in the full-length mirror and had to laugh: the girl in the Maiden form bra (ich!) and cotton Jockey bikinis (double ich!) was trying to look the part of Runway (Ibid, p.116).

In order to avoid being fired, Andrea realizes that she needs to start dressing beautifully. Now she clearly understands that changing her appearance is the only option for her to maintain her position and begin doing it at a high level. Naomi Wolf discusses this point in her book by saying; "Will I be taken seriously at work if I look 'too feminine'? Will I be listened to at all if I look 'too plain'? Am I 'bad' if I gain weight? 'Good' only if I lose every ounce" (Wolf, 1991, p. 8) This insinuates that women are constantly anxious about the way their appearance affects their position and their performance at the workplace.

## **b-The Effects of Social Standards on Women’s Psychology in *The Devil Wears Prada* :**

The psychological effects of social standards on women can manifest in different forms and can vary from a female to another. In the case of Andrea, she decides to change her appearance definitely; if wearing a Prada turtleneck instead of one from Urban Outfitters will help her, she would not hesitate to do so. She comforts herself saying that dressing like those people would not change her. Nigel is the one who thought that Andrea would look beautiful with a few minor changes. She is not horrible; she just needs some adjustments. He decides to save Andrea by assisting her to borrow garments from the runway wardrobe and properly match them, to get an expensive outfit. In chapter ten, Weisberger asserts:

“What’s this?” I’d asked, unzipping the garment bag.

“This, Andy, is what you should be wearing if you don’t want to get fired.” He smiled, but he wouldn’t look me in the eye.

“I’m sorry?”

“Look, I just think you should know that your, uh, your look isn’t really going over well with everyone around here. Now, I know this stuff gets expensive, but there’s ways around that. I’ve got so much stuff in the Closet that no one will notice if you need to, uh, borrow some of it sometimes.” He made quote marks with his fingers around the word “borrow.” “And, of course, you should be calling all the PR people and getting your discount card for their designers. I only get thirty percent off, but since you work for Miranda, I’ll be surprised if they charge you for anything. There’s no reason for this, uh, Gap thing you’ve got going on to continue” (Weisberger, 2003, p. 116)

Nigel warns Andrea that everyone in the workplace does not really like the way she looks. She must consider his advice seriously and start being elegant, just like everyone else. After the makeover, Andrea observes that people view her differently. They have become more interested and respectful to her. Andrea thus adapts and goes with the flow, and she becomes more performing and more confident while doing her work. She is no longer terrified of Miranda.

In chapter twelve, Weisberger describes a phone call in which Andrea informs Miranda that she has accomplished all the duties she is assigned to. She tells her that the hair and makeup appointment is confirmed and the nannies she has been searching for her girls are ready to be interviewed. When Miranda arrives to New York, she discovers three exclusive candidates (Weisberger, 2003, p. 204). This enables us to comprehend that Andrea is getting used to Miranda, as seen by the way she responds to her demands. She is no longer anxious when she answers the phone as she used to be. In addition, Andrea is performing each task flawlessly, which surprises but satisfies Miranda.

Improving one's physical appearance is a quick and efficient technique to enhance confidence. One feels more at ease, confident, capable, cooperative and productive when he/she looks attractive and appropriate for the situation. From the way everyone has changed his/her interactions with Andrea, we can say that this is just a reaction to Andrea's new appearance and attitude. In chapter thirteen, Weisberger confirms:

Oh, she's quite serious," she said, picking up the phone. "I'll help you, OK? You go find the review in the Washington Post and get her a copy before she leaves—Uri is coming for her soon to take her home for her hair and makeup. I'll get you a dress and everything else you need for tonight. Don't worry. We'll figure it out." She began rapid-fire dialing and whispering urgent-sounding instructions into the phone. I stood and stared, but she waved her hand without looking up and I snapped back to reality (Weisberger, 2003, p. 254)

Only after Andrea has undergone a makeover, we realize that Emily treats Andrea with respect. Andrea is now recognized and considered a member of the "Runway" team. She impresses her coworkers at work now with her new clothes and attractive appearance. She is much more respected and well treated than before, even if she is still the same person, and changed only physically.

Because of the comments women who are less physically attractive receive from society, they have low self-esteem and less confidence than those who are. The new beautiful and

elegant Andrea is in a position where she is surrounded by people who place a greater emphasis on appearances rather than personality. Everything centers on the necessity of the fashion industry, including its cruelty, and the significance of changing who you are in order to live up to its standards. Weisberger, in chapter fourteen, states:

The entire office had worked itself up to a nearly hysterical frenzy trying to make me look appropriate for the night's gala affair. It certainly wasn't because they all adored me so much and killed themselves trying to help me out; rather, they knew Miranda had mandated the makeover and were eager to prove to her the high level of their taste and class. (Weisberger, 2003, p. 255)

According to Andrea, the entire office work hard, not to help her but just because they have received orders from Miranda and are willing to show their refinement and sophistication. Andrea knows well that the people around her are fake and care only for their interests. In addition, one may experience professional difficulties when he/she first begins his/her job, but what matters is learning to embrace who you are and what makes you special.

Due to the criticism Andrea receives from her colleagues in the office she is conditioned to accept the arbitrary beauty standards that society sets. Many people face judgment every day based on how they appear or what they are wearing. Since physical appearance is the first and most enduring impression that others have of us, it does influence our sense of who we are. People may draw conclusions about your personality based on the way you seem. As it is mentioned in Naomi Wolf's theory "Our society does reward beauty on the outside over health on the inside"(Ibid, p.230). This means that a positive personal appearance is a fast, effective way to be considered acceptable in our societies.

The concept of the ideal body can cause troubles related to self-esteem for a lot of people. Those who place more value on their appearance than their moral character can never be content, because socially acceptable standards of beauty shift throughout time. Naomi Wolf has highlighted this idea affirming that "You do not win by struggling to the top of a caste system,

you win by refusing to be trapped within one at all.” (Wolf, 1991, p. 290), so that you may understand that you can only defeat the system by fighting back.

## **2-Social Pressure on Women in *Beauty* :**

Similarly, Christina Chiu through her protagonist Amy Wong, portrays how social oppression and family expectations affect women. The latter are expected to be perfect at different levels including appearance and behavior. It is said that “oppression is the inequitable use of authority, law or physical force to prevent others from being free or equal” (Napikoski, 2020). Through this statement, we come to understand that oppression may keep someone down in society. It may also burden someone mentally, with psychological ideas.

### **a-Family Expectations:**

*The Beacon Magazine* (2018) article entitled “The Standards of Beauty: A Dangerous Ideal” discusses that beauty has always been society’s obsession, which idealizes the unrealistic fact of staying young forever. In addition, beauty standards cause damage to thousands of women from all areas, regardless of age, race and even class. In her novel, Christina Chiu questions the two eastern and western gender constructs. The latter are an astute portrayal of second generation Chinese women’s personal development in modern America through her Chinese protagonist Amy Wong who struggles with her family expectations. Her relationship with her mother becomes complex especially after her father’s abandonment which made her feel worthless and underestimated.

Christina Chiu’s *Beauty*, covers many events that her protagonist has witnessed through her journey to fashion. Chiu claims that Amy develops a sort of disappointment of herself when she could not convince her mother either of her journey as a fashion designer or as a wife and mother. On the one hand, Amy’s mother has never been satisfied with her daughter despite her efforts to make her proud. Her sister Georgie, on the other hand, is the favorite child because of

being more beautiful and intellectual than Amy. We may sense Amy's frustration and loss following the severity she has experienced as an adolescent. In the first three chapters, Chiu portrays how Amy's family expectations had a significant influence on her self-esteem, particularly after being abandoned by her father.

Amy is devastated and disappointed because she has not become the girl her mother expected. She is still feeling inferior and unable to reach her Asian traditional family expectations. Furthermore, her physical appearance was her downside. According to Heather Hewett's article "*The Eye*" (2020) Amy is not completely aware of her body or even her look, until the day she got harassed by a shoe sell man, "Beautiful, no one has called me that" (Hewett, 2020). It is for the first time that Amy gets complimented. She has always questioned her appearance. She says "I glance down at the sweats I'm wearing.

My hair is back up in a messy ponytail. I feel myself slump lower. I don't need a mirror to know what I must look like". (Chiu, 2020, p. 113) Amy develops a low self-esteem which makes her think that she is not good looking. She says:

I shower and get ready even though I'm still not certain for what. The first thing I try on is a white Theory dress. It makes me look fat. The second is a Helmut Lang jersey dress, but that makes me look frumpy. Finally, I step into what I originally planned to wear to the wedding, a form-fitting, black Herve Leger dress with white piping. But this, too, looks wrong. (Chiu, 2020, p. 115)

From the quotation, we can clearly see how Amy is struggling to find anything suitable to wear. She believes no one of the dresses fits her. According to Naomi Wolf, the world of work has not always been easy for foreigners and people of color in general but also for women in particular. The latter work twice as much as men with lower salaries. Wolf states that "Women work hard." (Wolf, 1991, p. 25). This is shown in this conversation:

Jones turns to Ben. "Is she always this uptight?" Ben cracks up, laughing. "Yes. She's a work-a-holic."  
"Not because I want to be," I say.  
"She's playing catch up," Ben sighs. "She's from the liberal arts."  
"You want to be a good designer?" Jones says. "Don't be so uptight."

“I’m not uptight.” I stare at the smirk on his face. (Chiu, 2020, p. 60)

In the above quotation, Amy is described as a ‘work-a-holic’, not because she wants to but she is obliged to work hard. Christina Chiu wants to portray how women’s position at work is and how they are judged, either by their physical appearance “to look perfect” (Chiu, 2020, p. 180) or by their race. This is shown through her protagonist Amy Wong who gets to face the brutal world of work specifically the world of fashion in order to realize her dream of becoming a fashion designer.

Another burden faced by women is their ethnicity. After her marriage with the famous designer Jeff Jones, Amy experiences racism from her husband due to her Chinese origins.

She is confused by Jeff’s comment. She says:

That bed should be mine,” Jones says. “Those Chinese can be so goddamn cunning. You have to watch them....“I’m sorry. Did I lose my face or something? Because the last I checked I was Chinese.” I lean against the bathroom doorway. Either he’s inebriated or he’s just plain stupid. (Chiu, 2020, pp. 62-63)

Jeff’s racism towards Chinese people is clearly displayed. In a moment, he expresses his anger towards Chinese people disregarding that his wife is one of them. As a matter of fact, not only Jeff but most Americans do not welcome immigrants with wide arms. They even make it more difficult for them to assimilate and integrate. Christina Chiu demonstrates how the foreign women are constrained by society and how it is difficult for them to integrate in the working world. America is a selective country that imposes its laws on foreign people in many fields. In her theory, Naomi Wolf states:

Clinic’s brochure offers “a Western appearance to the eyes” to “the Oriental Eyelid,” which...admires “the... ‘Western’ nose,” ridicules “Asian Noses,” “Afro-Caribbean Noses (‘a fat and rounded tip which needs correction’),” and “Oriental Noses (‘the tip...too close to the face’).” And “the Western nose that requires alteration invariably exhibits some of the characteristics of (non-white) noses...although the improvement needed is more subtle.” White women, together with black and Asian women, undergo surgery not as a consequence of selfish vanity, but in reasonable reaction to physical discrimination. (Wolf, 1991, p. 270)

The above quotation shows clearly that the United States is a tough and selective country. It is a country where immigrants particularly women suffer from racism and discrimination. They are oppressed for being different from the westerners who possess perfect bodies.

Women have always been judged by their body and their physical appearance. Thus, because of the pressure society imposes on them, they exploit their physical beauty in order to have their place in the working world. According to Naomi Wolf, beauty is exploited in the workplace because women are classified based on "beauty standards" She states that "In another study, 35 percent of men versus only 15 percent of women say that they use their appearance for rewards in the workplace."(Wolf, 1991, p. 52). That is to say, women admit they exploit their beauty for employment incentives, yet men's percentage is still higher. This is the case for Amy, who attempts to use her beauty with the famous fashion designer called Jeff Jones, whom she met at a fashion party. She attempts to look perfect so as to be noticed by him. She says:

I try it on. The dress fits perfectly. It would be cheesy to wear a Jeff Jones to a Jeff Jones party, but it's so unique, so perfect, and so rare. I match it with Louboutin to give it a contemporary twist, but next to the dress, the red soles are like a loud, gaudy stepmother (Chiu, 2020, p. 51)

This demonstrates how Amy uses her appearance to get the attention of Jeff so that she might get the job she wanted.

Chiu illustrates how even after their marriage; Amy is expected to look beautiful since she is the wife of the boss. Thus, she dresses well to be accepted and look good. She says "how to justify? Well, I did save more than two hundred on the dress. Besides, I don't have a pair of sandals like these. And I'm Jeff Jones's wife. I need to be presentable. "I'll take them," I say, handing over the card" (Ibid, p.116). This demonstrates how crucial a woman's physical appearance is in society and how women are forced to take care of their appearance in order to avoid criticism. Despite knowing that Jeff Jones is an old divorced father who owns a fashion

company, Amy does not hesitate to approach him in order to secure a job in his fashion company. However, things do not go as she planned, as she faces marriage proposal that she has not expected at all “then marry me” he says” (Chiu, 2020, p. 95). When Amy informs her mother about her marriage, she is bothered that her mother could not believe that her daughter would ever get married. She says “I know it’s hard to believe that someone might actually want to marry me” (Ibid, p.94).

In fact, Amy Wong is like Andrea in *The Devil Wears Prada*, since both of them get oppressed and pressured to alter themselves to fit others’ expectations. On the one hand, Andrea steps away from her initial dream of writing articles for the New Yorker magazine to become just a simple assistant who is forced to adjust to the workplace with its ‘unwritten rules’. On the other hand, Amy moves away from her goal of a fashion designer and getting sidelined racing into marriage and parenthood also to fit her family’s expectation of being an ideal wife and mother. She soon realizes that she is forced to abandon her career for the sake of Jeff and her child.

In fact, like many other societies, women are expected to sacrifice their lives and jobs to simplify their husbands’ life. This is shown in the novel when Ben, Amy’s best friend, tells Jeff that “It must be a challenge to balance work with family” but Jeff responds saying “Not too much. My wife handles it so I can work.” (Ibid, p.60). This shows that it is women’s duty to make it easy to men’s life. However, despite accomplishing her duties well, Amy is confronted with abuse, neglect and betrayal from her husband. She says “maybe he fell into his old patterns. He started to look elsewhere. He came home reeking of sex and Coco Mademoiselle” (Ibid, p.105). Amy begins to feel helpless and less attractive than before, especially after her engagement with Jeff.

According to Naomi Wolf, society continues to oppress women not only to be beautiful, but also to fulfill the roles of a good mother and housewife, Wolf states:

[...]they enabled the harassed mother, the overburdened housewife, to make contact with her ideal self: that self which aspires to be a good wife, a good mother, and an efficient homemaker... women's expected role in society[was]to strive after perfection in all three roles. (Wolf, 1991, p. 70)

We can see from this passage that society constantly expects women to accomplish more duties. Naomi Wolf states that “myths about motherhood, domesticity, chastity, and passivity, no longer can manage.” (Ibid, p.17). Christina Chiu portrays motherhood as a difficult step in Amy's journey. She is always considered as “a bad mother” by Jeff and her mother because she regards motherhood as the reason behind her professional failure. Amy says:

I tell him honestly about Alex: not only about how tough it has been, but how clueless my husband is about the situation. “I don't know who I am anymore,” I say... “It's like the real me got lost.” I try not to cry... but my mind snags against the prenup and the many other injustices... I feel mortified ...yet, I confide that nothing I do, nothing I endure, will ever be enough to prove my love to Jeff. “I'm done trying,” I explain, and once I say it—once it's out there—it becomes obvious. (Chiu, 2020, p. 117)

From Amy's words, we sense the amount of pressure she experiences as a mother and how her husband is completely unaware of what she is enduring. She is lost and miserable while, her husband lives his life normally as if only women are concerned with taking care of the children.

All these circumstances have created self-hatred in her. She comes upon a situation where she must choose between her family and her employment, while her husband is preoccupied with his work and managing his fashion business. Amy is obliged to handle her work as an assistant buyer and her role as mother and housewife. Unfortunately, her son once had a terrible accident and her family constantly blames her for not giving too much attention to him. She felt misjudged because her family expects her to leave her job which means a lot for her.

Amy is lost and decides to turn to her mother for advice. However, she ends up being misunderstood as usual, because for her mother, a woman's priority should be her children “He's your son,” she says. “What's more important, uh?” (Ibid, p.141). Chiu's protagonist Amy becomes increasingly weak and desperate. She feels trapped in an infinite maze with no aid or

support, not even from her own family. She is now abandoned and rejected by everyone simply because she feels like herself again owing to her work. She is overwhelmed by her family's expectations and traditions.

### **b- Being A Good Housewife:**

According to Naomi Wolf, women are manipulated and victimized by marriage, she states: “In 1962, Betty Friedan quoted a young woman trapped in the ‘Feminine Mystique’ : “Lately, I look in the mirror, and I’m so afraid I’m going to look like my mother.”(Wolf, 1991, p. 18) The quotation implies that women are psychologically weakened by social pressure and expectations. The speaker is terrified to be like her mother, since she is aware of the pressure she undergoes. Amy, too is fed up with her own circumstances and her family’s unlimited expectations. She expresses her anguish saying:

I’m just a girl,” I repeat, suddenly overwhelmed by emotion. Within those five words lie a prison of other beliefs: Who do you think you are? Accept your place. You’re nothing; nobody. Your job is to nurture. Be a wife, a mother. Others’ desires come first. Yours don’t matter. You don’t matter. Your career doesn’t matter. What have you done? You’re selfish. Not good enough. Be grateful for what you get. (Chiu, 2020, p. 185)

After all the injustices she has experienced with her first husband Jeff, she begins to see the light at the end of the tunnel when she meets William. The latter is a single dad with a son named Toby, who is around the same age as Alex, her son. At first, Amy’s life is much better when William makes a marriage proposal and offers her and her son Alex a home. Her mother is uncomfortable with this man and repeatedly tells Amy that her worth is falling and that something is wrong with him. She ignores her mother's advice and decides to marry him, since he seems different and treats her with respect.

Unluckily, while living with William, Amy realizes that he is not different from other men. In fact, he is also among those who think a woman should be that ideal housewife who serves her husband and family. Amy describes him, “He gets under the comforter, expecting

me to clean up the mess, and turns away from me to sleep. I get off the bed, go into the bathroom, and wet a towel. I come back and wipe off the mess the best I can... ” (Chiu, 2020, p. 151) In addition, he is abusive with her as well as his son. Naomi Wolf sheds light on a critical issue which is physical violence on women by their husbands, she states “In the United States, twenty-one percent of married women report physical abuse by their mates. One and one-half million American women are assaulted by a partner every year; one British woman in seven is raped by her husband” (Wolf, 1991, p. 121).

Moreover, Christina Chiu demonstrates how Amy’s life deteriorates since William is overly dictatorial and possessive. He is a man who cannot control himself as he abuses his wife and son Toby. Amy feels shattered, a soulless body, and she is so ashamed of herself, especially after being raped, because of her refusal to sleep with him:

He looks at me, his face red and nostrils flaring. Then, he pins me down by the hips. He tears off my panties and tries to eat me out. I’m frigid, as frigid as can be, and I visualize my body to be a hollow, empty cavern. I feel nothing. It means nothing. He seems all the more determined, desperate, even, and I find myself smiling viciously. He can lick and bite me until I bleed, but I’m already elsewhere. He has no access; he can’t touch me. There is the old term “dead fish”; that’s what I am.(Chiu, 2020, p. 171)

Amy feels that her two marriages and her life have failed because of what she appears to be on the outside rather than what she appears to be in the inside. She recognizes that being too concerned with her appearance has caused her more problems than advantages. She begins to question who she truly is and what she has become:

The day William and I got married, I felt like I had failed not only my first marriage, but my life. I rub the cold wetness from my face. There’s a sniffing sound, and it takes a moment to realize it’s not actually coming from me, but from outside of myself (Ibid, p.190).

Amy realizes that her failure is caused by what she refers to as the "outside," which is society and people who control her by putting pressure on her to fit the role of the ideal woman. She

states that the people around “pressured me slowly, insistently, and I found myself isolated from friends, work” (Ibid, p.195).

After Amy's two unsuccessful marriages, she recognizes that her life is becoming increasingly difficult. She becomes an empty woman who has missed her life while she is too affected and concerned with people's opinions and criticism of her. She is now responsible for her two boys, Alex and Toby, whom she considers her own. She has to do everything she can to take care of them which implies balancing her home and her profession. Naomi Wolf argues that “Almost two out of three marriages in the United States end in divorce, ... More than 8 million American women raise at least one child alone” (Wolf, 1991, p. 121). According to Wolf, most women get divorced assuming huge responsibilities rather than being trapped in social prejudices about them.

In Christina Chiu's *Beauty*, Ben Amy's best friend, is the only person who believes in her. He is there for her whenever she needs help. Amy considers him as her source of motivation and strength because he is the only one who never judges her unlike her mother and ex-husbands who continually evaluate and underestimate her, she is trying to handle her personal and professional life to the best of her ability. Thanks to her friend Ben, Amy maintains her strength, despite the challenges she encounters. She is convinced that one day, she would be proud of herself. She is convinced that beauty is not eternal, but rather a doubleedged blade that can benefit as well as harm.

Referring to Naomi's Wolf, she emphasizes that beauty was never anything engraved on rocks, written on paper, or even found in religious literature, but rather a notion that the class structure we live in imposes and normalizes as a regular truth. She states “The unacceptable reality is that we live under a caste system. It is not innate and permanent; it is not based on sex or God or the Rock of Ages” (Wolf, 1991, p. 292). The sad fact is that we live in a exploitative society where beauty is most beneficial to those seeking to control women. Wolf states:

Women are not getting it wrong when they smoke to lose weight. Our society does reward beauty on the outside over health on the inside. Women must not be blamed for choosing short-term beauty “fixes” that harm our long-term health, since our life spans are inverted under the beauty myth, and there is no great social or economic incentive for women to live a long time(Wolf, 1991, p. 236).

Wolf claims that women are victims when they are under the guise of beauty. They are forced to experience physical and mental risks.

Christina Chiu emphasizes the inner beauty that women may have and especially provide via its heroine Amy Wong an example to prove that beauty is not just about a person's physicality or age but is a reflection of what the heart carries. It is shown through these words: “Well, now they’ve come into themselves. They’re more confident, more spiritual. They are 50, 55, 60. They realize exactly how beautiful they are. They walk down the street and it’s ‘Yes, look, this is the real me and I love it.’(Chiu, 2020, p. 261).

To conclude, both authors have explored in their novels, how social standards pressure women in societies. We have found that both female characters have experienced a type of social pressure in order to reach the goal of perfection. While the pressure Andrea has experienced is related to fitting the social standard of being beautiful, Amy Wong on the other side is pressured to be the beautiful and submissive wife and an ideal mother. Both female characters in the two novels get affected by these standards and try to comply and be the perfect women that everyone expects them to be.

## **Chapter Two: Women's Reactions to the Imposed Social Standards in Lauren Weisberger's *The Devil Wears Prada* and Christina Chiu's *Beauty*:**

### **1- In *The Devil Wears Prada*:**

#### **a-Women's Attempts to Fulfill Social Standards in *The Devil Wears Prada*:**

People can achieve "self-realization," or the path that includes the process of understanding oneself, which leads to a life that is meaningful and content. Individuals who have reached their full potential are more understanding than those who have not. They are also able to express their feelings in an open and honest manner. To start a journey to selfrealization, one should try to shift their perspective to alter his /her life as well. In *The Devil Wears Prada*, Lauren Weisberger pictures how women oppose the idea of being perfect, through her character Andrea.

The power Andrea gains from her beauty is best demonstrated when she gets a makeover, and comes to the office wearing a killer pair of thigh-high leather boots from Chanel. But is it really her? Even though Chanel boots are lovely, there are moments when you just have to be yourself. In her theory, Naomi Wolf has highlighted the point saying that "just because a woman looks "beautiful" does not mean she feels it".(Wolf, 1991, p. 292). This means women do not necessarily feel "beautiful" just because they appear to be so, their outside appearances do not usually match their inner emotions. In chapter seven Weisberger declares:

I stopped dead in my tracks and looked down. I was wearing a pair of funky street sneakers, the kind that weren't designed to do anything but look cool. The rules of dress—unspoken and otherwise—were obviously relaxed when Miranda was away, and even though every single person in the office looked fantastic, each was wearing something they would swear up and down that they'd never, ever wear in front of Miranda. My bright red, mesh sneakers were a prime example.(Weisberger, 2003, p. 98)

Andrea does not care about her appearance or anything related to beauty before being introduced to "Runaway" magazine. But when she starts working for Miranda, she receives comments about the way she dresses. Emily criticizes her clothing telling her "No, of course

you can't wear those.”(Weisberger, 2003, p. 98).These are the comments Andrea has been receiving from her coworkers, and thus decides to alter her appearance to stop their constant criticism of her. The truth is that Andrea is more than just a young woman who is tired of appearing pretty, as we previously indicated. In contrast to the rest, Andrea has a clear understanding of who she is.

In chapter eleven, Weisberger describes a scene where Miranda asks Andrea to join her to the office to talk about the engagement party. She says:

She had rattled off that list without a single pause in her note writing, and when she finished speaking she handed me her newly crafted note to mail. I finished scribbling on my pad, hoping I'd understood everything correctly, which, considering the accent and the rapid-fire cadence, wasn't always simple...OK,” I muttered and turned to go, bringing up my Total Miranda Words to four. Maybe I won't break fifty, I thought. I could feel her eyes examining the size of my butt as I walked back to my desk and briefly considered whipping around to walk backward like a religious Jew would do when leaving the Wailing Wall. Instead, I tried to glide toward the hidden safety of my desk while picturing thousands and thousands of Hasidim in Prada black, walking backward circles around Miranda Priestly.(Ibid, p.199)

When Andrea is heading to her desk, she feels Miranda assessing the size of her butt. Unfortunately, the “Runway” team criticizes Andrea despite her talent because of her terrible appearance. It has been brought up by Naomi Wolf's that “Dieting is the most potent political sedative in women's history” (Wolf, 1991, p. 187)which means that most women resort to dieting as an efficient solution to look beautiful as they turn thin and skinny.

The way Andrea is treated is a reflection of how she is pressured to compromise her values and principles and forget her worth, giving more attention to how she looks. Andrea does not realize that being in this environment keeps her from being happy and vivid. Her life has been simpler before coming to the magazine. Andrea recalls her life prior to joining the company saying:

My cheeks looked red and windburned in the rearview mirror, and my hair was flying wildly about. There was no makeup on my face, and my jeans were dirty around the bottom from trudging through the city slush. But at that moment, I felt beautiful. Natural and cold and clean and crisp, I threw open the front door and called out for my mother. It was the last time in my life I remember feeling so light. (Weisberger, 2003, p. 27)

Andrea is taken back to the time when she looked untidy, dirty, with no makeup but felt herself beautiful. It was a period in which she was surrounded by people who loved her and believed she is pretty, smart, exceptional and aspiring.

Andrea is now dealing with other people whose sole interest is appearance. Therefore, she becomes a workaholic in order to prove that competence is more important than appearance. She is confident that working a whole year as Miranda Priestley's assistant, will get her the job in *The New Yorker*. She dresses better than she did previously, even if she is not comfortable while wearing lovely and fashionable clothing.

Despite spending much time and effort on her career, Miranda never acknowledges her work.

In fact, managing both work and personal life is difficult in Andrea Sach's new life. Andrea reports that while working as Miranda's assistant, she feels worn out every day. She must act as quickly as possible after Miranda assigns her a task. Through time, she considers Miranda as her primary priority just like Emily whom she used to criticize. Andrea is forced to make everything quickly for her.

The phone rang in ten- to twelve-minute increments, each request sending another shock of pain directly to my head. Brrringg. "Get Mr. Tomlinson on his air phone on the jet." (B- DAD) didn't answer on his air phone when I tried calling it sixteen times). Brrringg. "Remind all the Runway editors in Paris that just because that they're here does not mean they can neglect their responsibilities at home- I want everything in by original deadline!". Brrringg. Get me a regular American turkey sandwich immediately! I'm tiring of all this ham." (I walked more than two miles in painful boots and with an upset stomach, but there was no turkey to be found anywhere. I'm convinced she knew, since she'd never once before asked for a turkey

sandwich while in America- even through, of course, they're available on every street corner). Brrringg! Brrringg! Brrringg! Brrringg! (Ibid p. 242)

The preceding quotation demonstrates how Andrea is constantly busy due to Miranda's unfulfilled needs. While working, she neglects her personal life as she devotes practically all her time to completing Miranda Priestley's mission. Andrea often questions herself and reconsiders whether her career is worth the sacrifices she makes.

Andrea lost weight as a result of constantly working hard as Miranda's assistant. She is somehow pleased of being skinny because this enables her to resemble a Runway girl. At breakfast, Andrea starts eating salad, peanuts and chooses diet soda over regular soda. It is all because Andrea adopts Emily's habit of consistently drinking diet coke. It has been declared by Naomi Wolf that the beauty myth hurts women physically and that "dieting becomes an addiction" (Wolf, 1991, p. 320). This addiction is shown through Andrea's conversation with Emily, which is clearly shown in this quotation.

hey, Em, I'm just going to run down to the newsstand and see if they have Women's Wear yet. I can't believe it's so late today. Do you want anything?" "will you bring me a diet coke?" she asked, diet coke as always. "sure, just a minute," I aid and weaved quickly through the racks and past the doorway to the elevator. I took two bottles of diet coke, one for Em and one for me.(Weisberger, 2003, p. 244)

It is obvious that like Emily, Andrea also begins to watch the things she has to consume. It must be healthy, with little to no sugar and no fat. Andrea's habits have greatly shifted as she is no more the person who goes to bed when she wants or eats whatever she wants whenever she is hungry.

Eating and sleeping are natural parts of human development but for Andrea, it becomes increasingly difficult due to the demands of her job. She works long hours without taking breaks. Andrea now realizes that she has become one of the Runway girls by saying; "Just this once, I thought to myself, sinking into the warm blanket and try to sleep. I'm Runway girl now." (Ibid. p53) . Andrea realizes that now, she appears like a runway model.

Moreover, Andrea has changed a lot to fit in at work. She is always trying to please her boss and colleagues. Although she experiences issues at work, she does not leave, the fact which gained her Miranda's respect and trust so that she decides to take Andrea to Paris instead of Emily. Andrea believes that her current position will get her one step closer to getting her ideal position, so she decides to travel to Paris with her boss.

Oh, well, when you put it like that, sign me up! Nothing quite like some over-the-top flattery to convince me to do something. Seriously, she shouldn't have said such nice things. I'm blushing!" I didn't know whether to focus on the fact that Miranda wanted me to go to Paris with her, or that she only wanted me to go because she considered me slightly less brain-dead than the anorexic French clones of, well . . . me.(Weisberger, 2003, p. 278)

The above quote demonstrates how excited Andrea is to visit Paris, but it is undeniable that something has changed in her. She is aware of being chosen to accompany Miranda not for her intelligence or ability to perform her job but rather for her new appearance. Thus, it is clear that Andrea now places more value on appearance than anything else in life as she starts improving her physical appearance at her work.

While being in Paris, every time Andrea appears in public with Miranda, she looks stunning in her beautiful clothes. This provides her self-assurance to perform her work brilliantly. Naomi Wolf in her theory states "The woman wins who calls herself beautiful and challenges the world to change to truly see her."(Wolf, 1991, p. 290), which means Andrea? after the makeover gains self-confidence and does her job perfectly which makes Miranda proud to demonstrate that she has the best team an editor could possibly have.

## **b-Women's Realization of Their Professional Worth in *The Devil Wears***

### ***Prada:***

Andrea's self-realization and awareness of her professional worth come into existence during her experience in Paris. Weisberger's protagonist gets a call from her mother informing her that Lily, her best friend, has endured a driving accident because of being drunk, and she is now in a coma.

Honey, I don't mean to interrupt you, but something's happend. We got a call today from Lenox Hill Hospital. I think, and it seems that Lily's been in an accident." And although it's quite conceivably the most cliched expression in the English language, my heart stopped for just a moment. "What? What are you talking about mom? What kind of an accident?" "A car accident, honey. A rather serious one,(Weisberger, 2003, p. 332)

Andrea is in a dilemma as she wants to see Lily in the hospital, but the concern how to get the permission from her boss. The latter is known for her rigidity in such matters. Andrea mocks Miranda saying:

I might not have taken a sick day or spent a single hour outside the office while Miranda was there, but Emily hadn't, either. The one time it had been close—when her great-grandfather had died—she'd managed to get home to Philadelphia, attend the funeral, and be back at her desk without missing a minute of work. This was how things worked. Period. Short of death (immediate family only), dismemberment (your own), or nuclear war (only if confirmed by the U.S. government to be directly affecting Manhattan), one was to be present. This would be a watershed moment in the Priestly regime. (Weisberger, 2003, p. 279)

Even if she could gain confidence of the "Runway" workers in general and Miranda in particular, Andrea understands that she is no exception than the others. Despite working so hard for Miranda, the latter cannot approve her visit to her close friend who is in a critical state.

Andrea as a consequence, decides to leave everything behind her. For the first time, she chooses to listen to her inner voice and decide for herself what is best for her. She understands that spending time with her family matters more than working hard. She has come to the

realization that she no longer wants to live in a fake, miserable world where only appearances matter. Andrea finally expresses her thoughts. She concludes that she is over with fighting for her job at the expense of losing herself and her family.

In addition, Andrea is not afraid of losing her job because she understands that she must take action to improve her life. To quote her words “So sorry, Miranda, I announced in a normal voice that for the first time since I’d landed in Paris wasn’t shaking uncontrollably, but I don’t think I’ll be able to make it to the party tomorrow.” (Weisberger, 2003, p. 345) We might infer from the quote that Andrea feels liberated after saying "so sorry," (Ibid, p. 345) which indicates that she is quitting. She thinks Miranda will soon acquire a second Andrea. She believes that once she leaves her job, there will be something better. Andrea makes a significant life change. She decides to leave her work, and she resigns proudly in front of Miranda.

When people have the freedom to make their own decisions, they are living a decent life and are completely functional. Andrea's decision to leave her position as Miranda's personal assistant in Runway magazine is shown in her insulting words to Miranda. She describes the situation as follows:

Ahn-dre-ah, you realize what you’re doing, do you not? You do know that if you simply leave here like this, I’m going to be forced- ” “f\*ck you, Miranda. F\*ck you.” She gasped audibly while her hand flew to her mouth in shock, and I felt not a few Clackers turn to see what the commotion was. They’d begun pointing and whispering, themselves as shocked as Miranda that some nobody assistant had just said that and too quietly to one of the great living fashion legend. (Ibid,P.345)

Andrea is no longer worried about losing her work, and she decides to leave. Miranda Priestley’s threat to fire her has not made her nervous or quiver as usual but instead gives her courage to insult her as a kind of revenge for her harshness. At last, she is able to preserve her life.

Finally, Andrea gets the strength to be honest and not hypocrite with Miranda. She no longer pretends to be somebody she is not and she stops acting like the beautiful doll who never says no. Instead, she now behaves and feels like a real human. Naomi Wolf has mentioned this

idea in her theory making it clear that “We won’t really believe it the way we need to until we start to take the first steps beyond the beauty myth”. (Wolf, 1991, p. 271) Consequently, we cannot alter who we are until we change the way we view the world.

After returning to the United States, branded clothing, shoes, and other items no longer interest Andrea. She is back to being herself again wearing sporting sneakers and basic attire. She “sold every last filmy top, leather pant, spiked boot, and strappy sandal.”(Weisberger, 2003, p. 361) She feels that one does not need to be a fake person to live a pleasant life and be totally functional. Furthermore, Andrea is hired by “Seventeen Magazine” whose main concern is her abilities rather than her looks.

Furthermore, Naomi Wolf asserts that “Women will be free of the beauty myth when we can choose to use our faces and clothes and bodies as simply one form of self-expression out of a full range of others. We can dress up for our pleasure, but we must speak up for our rights” (Wolf, 1991, p. 274) It means, to reject the beauty myth, women should be able to choose what they want to wear on their own terms, rather than out of fear of dissenting from the standard.

By the end of the novel, Andrea's receives a call from “Seventeen Magazine” calling to offer her a position as a journalist. In this job, Andrea does not need to dress stylishly because unlike in Runway, the publication requires her intellectual abilities to write articles and other creative works rather than her physical appearance. Andrea says:

The phone rang on my way to seek out hidden booty. “hello?” I answered in my best irritated voice. I’d finally stopped answering any ringing phone with “Miranda Priestley’s office” “hello there. Is Andrea Sachs there, please?” “speaking. May I ask who’s calling?” “Andrea, hi, this is Loretta Adriano from Seventeen magazine.” My heart lurched. I’d pitched a 2,000-word “fiction” piece about a teenage girl who gets so caught up on getting into college that she ignores her friends and family. “Hi! How are you?” “I’m fine, thank you. Listen, your story got passed along to me, and I have to tell you- I love it...” “why don’t we set up a meeting? You need to come in and fill out some of these papers, and I’d like to meet you anyway. Bring anything else you think might work for the magazine.” “Great. Oh, that

sound great.” We agreed to meet next Friday at three, and I hung up still not believing what had happened. (Weisberger, 2003, p. 356)

Andrea is informed that the story she has previously sent to Seventeen magazine has attracted the attention of the editors, and thus they are willing to hire her as a journalist. Andrea is in disbelief, since she thinks no other magazine will hire her again because of her conduct with Miranda.

After leaving Runway, Andrea accepts a position as a journalist at Seventeen magazine. Although working for the New Yorker is her ideal job, she feels that working as a journalist for Seventeen magazine is much better than working as an assistant. Her interest is writing, not working as an assistant. Andrea decides to return to her real self at the end of the story. She is no longer interested in branded items. She hands her clothing and purse to her mother. Now she is confident that her inner characteristics can help her become a fully realized individual. She is also certain that it is more important for her to function where she appears than how she appears. With reference to Naomi Wolf’s theory:

The “beautiful” woman does not win under the myth; neither does anyone else. The woman who is subjected to the continual adulation of strangers does not win, nor does the woman who denies herself attention. The woman who wears a uniform does not win, nor does the woman with a designer outfit for every day of the year. You do not win by struggling to the top of a caste system, you win by refusing to be trapped within one at all. The woman wins who calls herself beautiful and challenges the world to change to truly see her (Wolf, 1991, p. 290)

According to the above passage, the only way to eliminate the beauty myth is to be aware of it and fight against its standards of beauty. Naomi Wolf has explained that for years, women have been taught to desire beauty, but it is high time to reject this false notion.

Finally, as Wolf states “why is it never said that the really crucial function that women serve as aspiring beauties is to buy more things for the body? (Weisberger, 2003, p. 66) In other words, the real cause behind the beauty myth is to keep women triggered about appearance and looks so as to spend huge amount of money to look attractive. This is stated by Andrea when

she says “Editorial traveled to hot spots around the world for shoots, got free gifts and discounts from all the designers, hunted for trends, and went to parties at Pastis and Float because they “had to check out what people were wearing.”(Weisberger, 2003, p. 122) We understand that there are those who gain wealth at the expense of people, especially women who are ‘haunted’ by buying branded and expensive outfits to look elegant. We can then say that the beauty myth is one of the inventions and lies that are created by society to keep women down.

## **2- In *Beauty*:**

### **a- Women’s Attempt to Fulfill Social Standards in Christina Chiu’s *Beauty*:**

Like Weisberger, Christina Chiu also portrays her main character Amy Wong as a woman who has finally achieved self-realization through her life journey. Naomi Wolf states that if women manage to live their life as they desire without fearing what others would think about them, or at “least know that there is something terribly wrong if they are forced to think this way—it is testimony to the power of an idea in the minds of a lot of women at once; proof of their ability to create lasting change and even a bit more freedom.” (Wolf, 1991, p. 14). This means that to be free, women need to trust themselves and take their own decisions without worrying about others’ views.

Thus, women must recognize their own interests and have their own understanding of what the ideal beauty is. They should be able to decide for themselves what to do with their bodies because in fact “people extend as a matter of course to the bodies of men does not apply to those of women: women have little physical privacy. Each change or weight fluctuation is publicly observed, judged, and discussed” (Wolf, 1991, p. 133).

The beauty seen with the eyes does not remain forever. Instead of focusing on exterior beauty, we should rather focus on inner beauty. It is argued that physical appearance without inner beauty is skin without a soul; this means that inner beauty matters more than outside

beauty. In Christina Chiu's novel *Beauty*, the writer portrays the importance and the power of the inner beauty and how the latter can afford strength and resilience to women, against those beauty standards.

In her novel, Christina Chiu explores several types of beauty including physical and inner beauty. Amy's harsh experiences in life have helped her understand her own worth and virtue. The Asian author examines how beauty standards influence Asian women in today's culture, particularly in the United States. Amy Wong is the best example of a modern woman, who overcomes numerous obstacles. The author demonstrates how she discovers her power despite her flaws and people's expectations and judgments on her way to become a fashion designer.

Chiu's protagonist has succeeded to confront and proceed against others' judgments. This is by starting to believe in herself and accepting and recognizing her merits after her several bad personal and professional experiences. At first, Amy is pleased to hear others' praise and comments telling her 'you are beautiful' viewing it as a source of strength. Nevertheless, later on, she starts to learn and appreciate the true essence of beauty and realizes that what matters is the inside rather the outer beauty as the later fades with time. Christina Chiu states:

Finally 50," Jeff says. "These are the comeback women, the ones who were beautiful in their 20s and 30s but never seemed to know it on the inside. We all know one or two of these women, now, don't we?" He glances at me. At Jayne. The other's nod, yes, yes...Well, now they've come into themselves. They're more confident, more spiritual. They are 50, 55, 60. They realize exactly how beautiful they are. They walk down the street and it's 'Yes, look, this is the real me and I love it. (Chiu, 2020, p. 261)

The above passage shows clearly Christina Chiu's portrayal of women's self-realization. At a younger age, most women tend to underestimate themselves in relation to what is called 'Beauty ideals' which includes possessing some physical traits like being young, thin, beautiful and feminine. However, the same women achieve acceptance and self-awareness while growing by understanding that what remains is their inner beauty : their minds and hearts. Amy Wong is

the perfect example of a woman who knows how to appreciate herself and her physical appearance, and being authentic the way she desires.

In the first few pages of the novel, Amy is offered little support from her family, notably her mother, who considers her as unsuccessful due to her two disastrous marriages. She is constantly pointed at and condemned. However, despite the negative criticism and condemnation of her mother, Amy learns an important lesson from her which is that beauty comes from working on oneself “Forty’s the new thirty, “I’m strong, healthy, and haven’t had so much as a cold in years.” (Chiu, 2020, p. 161) she also says:

I needed to look perfect, cash in on my beauty the way she had because I’d gotten it from her, after all, and I owed it to her now. And yet, once I was beautiful in my own right, on my own terms, Ma told me, “What’s beauty, anyway? It fades with age. (Ibid. P180)

Amy feels the need to look perfect, because it is the only way to feel that she owns the beauty of her mother.

### **b- Women’s Realization of their Professional Worth in *Beauty*:**

In the case of Chiu’s main character, Amy’s marital experiences have encouraged her to shift the way she perceives herself, which has pushed her to change her life. Amy’s two marriages have a significant role in her transformation, particularly the marriage with William. Despite being toxic, her marriage with William has helped her to be the woman she is, a woman with a strong character and more solid than rock “I’m a wall, I tell myself. Just cold, hard brick. No emotions. No tears” (Chiu,2020,P.151) this means that her experience with William has hardened and strengthened her.

Moreover, she is able to find hope with William’s son Toby. She acknowledges that her “relationship with Toby grows deeper and more resilient each day,” (Ibid. p161). Thanks to that child, she feels herself again, she is able to reclaim the role of motherhood that she has lost while raising her own son Alex. She is determined to do everything possible to protect and

devote herself to them. She makes a promise to free Toby from the nightmare he is living with his father William, especially since Toby's father is abusive and aggressive. Chiu states:

I soak in the hot tub. William and I wed one year ago, but it has been so suffocating, it feels more like eight. My lawyer's serving him the divorce papers tomorrow. I'm relieved the boys and I won't be there for it. William can put a hole in the wall if he wants; I'm fine as long as I don't have to be there to witness it. (Ibid, p.174)

We can understand that Amy is finally aware that her husband has no right to treat her and his child that way and thus decides to divorce, even if this goes against her mother's will. She has taken the decision to head her life the way she wants. This is shown through her conversation with her mother:

But you did." She makes a sucking sound through her teeth. "Divorce, divorce.  
Tell me—who will want you now, mh?"  
"Me," I say, finally.  
Ma makes a throaty sound, something like laughter, but tinged with bitterness. She's angry I'm not more. She can't boast about my accomplishments; instead, she has to hide her shame. (Chiu, 2020, p. 175)

Amy clearly asserts that she does not need any man in her life. Her answer to her mother shows her readiness to be herself.

According to Naomi Wolf, "A woman wins when she feels that what each woman does with her own body—unforced, uncoerced—is her own business" (Wolf, 1991, p. 296) This is to suggest that women should be allowed to do anything they want with their bodies and appear as they want. Chiu shows how Amy realizes that her attractiveness has not benefited her, because she finds that whatever efforts and sacrifices she makes, nothing will please her husband or her family. For that reason, she comes to apprehend that all what matters is herself.

Amy has also become proud of her culture and origins despite the racism and the physical discrimination Asian people face in America. According to Naomi Wolf, immigrants and

individuals of different races are not welcome in the United States, as they are marginalized and powerless. Amy who was initially ashamed of being Asian has changed radically to say later on "...I have to admit now, seeing that bed at the heart of this room, I am proud to be Chinese, and I'm proud to be the granddaughter of the man who created it". (Chiu, 2020, p. 52). She becomes mature, and understands how to stick to her culture and identity as a Chinese woman even at the workplace, which is a challenge for her. She proves to be strong and fearless in the face of any critique or judgment and struggles to balance her career and personal life.

Later, Chiu demonstrates how Amy's love for her two kids, Alex and Toby, gives her strength to take matters into her own hands. She is committed to provide her two sons a better life and a hopeful future. Wolfs states that "women still...ate leftovers... Our mothers still exiled themselves from the family circle that was eating cake with silver cutlery...and ...would come...in the kitchen, furtively devouring the remains". (Wolf, 1991, p. 191) This shows the extent to which mothers sacrifice for the sake of their children's welfare. Amy's affection for her two children, but especially her tight connection with Toby, makes her a happy woman and, above all a good mother for him "No, it's not. I love you like a son and you love me like a mom. The adoption thing doesn't change that. We don't need a piece of paper to prove that."(Chiu,2020, p. 177).It demonstrates how much Amy loves Toby despite being an adopted child.

Furthermore, Chiu portrays how Amy handles the situation and gets a job as an assistant buyer with the support of her friend Ben. The latter is the only person who encourages and believes in her. He acts as a motivator and advisor for her. She decides to register for a master workshop that would allow her to pursue her aspirations of becoming a fashion designer.

At the end of the story, Christina Chiu guides us on a broad route toward self-discovery and acceptance, demonstrating how women appreciate their bodies and realize that what is essential is their inner beauty. Amy says: "Look, I'm really flattered, but..." The reason I'm in

Florida for the Masters Class is to develop myself and gain control over my life. Not the other way around” (Ibid, p.176). Through this statement, the author demonstrates how Amy no longer cares about other people's opinions about her. She is not the woman who used to feel pleased whenever someone compliments her appearance.

Amy is aware that aging is something she cannot control, developing inner beauty is something she can manage and enhance as she grows. According to Naomi Wolf “Thin women may feel fat; young women will grow old. When one woman looks at another, she cannot possibly know the self-image within that woman...”(Wolf, 1991, p. 292) This indicates that women should understand their own value rather than rely on the views of others. Furthermore, women should be totally self-confident, and have the freedom to choose whether they engage in exterior beauty or not.

Christina Chiu portrays a moment that changes Amy’s way of thinking about appearance and the true meaning of being and looking beautiful. She realizes that the person she has always tried to be is a fake one. A woman’s environment pushes her to alter herself to look just like those women on magazines, Chiu states “ I used to feed off the latest designer fashions to inform my own closet, but somehow even these seem foreign to me now” (Chiu, 2020, p. 113)

Amy’s self-confidence has been regained, since she has altered her perception of things, and starts to take care of her life in her own manner. She says “I take off my wedding ring and drop it into my change purse. Tonight, I’m not a wife or mother. I’m me.” (Ibid. P.116) She finally comes to realize that she must find and appreciate herself as an individual rather than wife or mother. Her family, and particularly her ex-husband after viewing the type of woman she has become, start to respect her. Her husband who used to see her unworthy, now admires and recognizes her skills, which makes her even more proud of herself. Her ex-husband tells her:

Time out,” he says, making a T with his hands. “I’m not demented yet.” “It’s not the least bit funny, but we both crack up laughing. When we finally settle

down, he says, “Look, I know I can’t change the past, but at JJ NYC, you’ll get tons of experience while getting to know our customer, so in a year or two—”

“Oh, my god. After all these years, Jeff finally sees me. For a moment, I’m that girl again—the one trying on her wedding dress. Hopeful, brilliant, youthfully naive.(Ibid, p.223)

Despite differences in race, color and physical appearance, Amy has succeeded to be the brave woman she is today. There is always a way for us, as long as we have the choice. This is the case for Amy who chooses to face her problems. She makes the choice to be authentic and independent for others’ control. She is proud of the woman she has become. Beauty is believed to be a weapon in the hands of a woman who understands how to wield it. However, this weapon will lose its usefulness with time, leaving just the beauty that a woman has within her.

In the last chapter of the novel entitled “Black Lace and Blue Secrets”, Christina Chiu shows the moral that Amy has learned from her journey:

My heart—everything—stops. What is wrong with this younger generation? They have freedom to choose who and what they want to be. What they want to do. Where they want to go. Everything my generation of women fought against, they embrace like shit got turned to diamonds (Chiu, 2020, p. 267)

These words show Amy’s self-realization and awareness. Understanding how to accept and love ourselves and be the person we have decided to be is the most significant step that can lead us to be free from the beauty myth.

Weisberger and Chiu have the same response to these societal impacts. They have illustrated how women choose their own way of life. With Andrea in *The Devil Wears Prada*, who chooses to abandon her career in order to rediscover herself, and Amy Wong in *Beauty* decides not to give way to those who want to control her life but instead be attractive and worthy in her own manner. Through Naomi Wolf’s final conclusion in which she affirms that “The next phase of our movement forward as individual women, as women together, and as tenants of our

bodies and this planet, depends now on what we decide to see when we look in the mirror. What will we see?" (Wolf, 1991, p. 297)

To conclude, both writers' works have addressed quite similar themes. Both novelists have depicted how the American and Asian societies place pressure on women, and how this affects their protagonists in their professional and personal lives. Weisberger's character Andrea, struggles with her boyfriend, family and boss; whereas Chiu's main character struggles with balancing her dream of becoming a fashion designer with her family's expectations of her being a successful woman and a good mother for her children.

## Conclusion

From our examination, we concluded that *The Devil Wears Prada* by Lauren Weisberger and *Beauty* by Christina Chiu, that both authors have addressed the topic of how society continues to put pressure on women by expecting them to be attractive everywhere and at all times. They also emphasized the process, by which strong women grow to understand their value and come to terms with their own knowledge and skills as independent women in their communities. The two female writers have gone through similar experiences and a similar pressure, specifically at the work place.

Both authors utilize their creative works to illustrate how they suffer in their communities as women. They both have discussed the pressure society places on them to achieve perfection. The idea is derived from Naomi Wolf's *The Beauty Myth* (1991) which covers most of the themes mentioned in our dissertation. The two novels have dealt with the social pressure on women through the two main characters. On the one hand, we have a twenty-three-year-old girl Andrea Sachs. The author gives a detailed account of her life and demonstrates how society still pressures women and uses the idea of "perfection" to make them feel undesirable and in a constant search for change. On the other hand, it is clear that Christina Chiu is able to highlight the life of an Asian woman in a modern American society in her book *Beauty*. Christina Chiu, through her protagonist, Amy Wong, also explains and shows how society continues to put pressure on women and make them feel bad under the guise of "perfection. According to both writers, social expectations may be harmful to women's physical and mental health because when society expects women to be someone they are not, it forces them to alter their reality without considering who they truly are.

Both novels have discussed the effects of social standard on women and their reactions to them. Andrea in *The Devil Wears Prada* has undergone significant adjustments in order to fit in at work, and she constantly aims to satisfy her supervisor and imitate employees. She does

so through changing her physical appearance and personality as well to fit in. However, the weaknesses of Andrea are then turned into strength. Her perspective in her life has shifted from one that society, her coworkers, and her employer have recommended her to be, to the one that Andrea has chosen in the way she prefers. Amy Wong in *Beauty*, on the other hand, is also affected by social standards. She experiences a certain level of self-disappointment after failing to persuade her mother of her path as a fashion designer or as a wife and mother. However, Amy's perspective on her life is transformed from a one prescribed by society and her family to the one she chooses and takes the lead in the direction she wants.

Lauren Weisberger's and Christina Chiu's works have a lot in common. The conclusion of *The Devil Wears Prada* and Andrea's choice to leave the "Runway" and return to her actual self might be seen as a reflection of Christina Chiu's Amy Wong, who likewise, made the choice to find her real self and leave her husband, since he does not value who is she.

To conclude, the present dissertation did not cover all the issues that have been tackled in *The Devil Wears Prada* by Lauren Weisberger and *Beauty* by Christina Chiu. Hence, since the scope of the dissertation is limited to study the effects of social standards on women, we invite students to study the two novels from other perspectives. There are still other subjects that need further investigations, for example, Gender Inequality.

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