

## **WOMEN'S READING AND WRITING PRACTICES: EXPLORING *CHICK-LIT* AS A SITE OF STRUGGLE IN POPULAR CULTURE AND LITERATURE**

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### **Abstract**

This paper represents an exploration into “chick-lit” literature and its significance in the popular cultural context. As a genre of popular literature written for young urban women, the tremendous commercial success of the popular chick-lit fiction inevitably calls for a critical assessment of its status within literature and popular culture. This paper aims to explore the genre’s significance for the research about popular literature, its relationship to literary and scholarly criticism, and women’s reading and writing practices. By focusing on the production, consumption, and reception of chick-lit as a global feminine genre, this paper presents the main characteristics of chick-lit fiction as well as revealing its differences from other genres such as conventional romances. It also highlights the strengths and limitations of the genre in relation to literary values and cultural standards. Chick-lit’s incredible popularity as a cultural and literary phenomenon is further investigated under the light of several critical debates introduced by Stuart Hall, Lawrence W. Levine, Michel de Certeau and John Fiske. This paper also considers chick-lit as a deeply contradictory genre of literature that generates highly polarized responses, thus as a site of continuous struggle between “consent and resistance”. To view chick-lit either from an entirely negative or an entirely positive perspective would be to oversimplify both the genre and the issues related to literature. Therefore, by considering chick-lit’s both wide appeal to its readers and denunciation by literary critics as trivial fiction, and exploring the positions taken up in academic and popular discussions about the genre, the paper seeks to examine the polarized responses and the questions chick-lit raises regarding literature, popular culture and contemporary socio-cultural realities of women.

**Keywords:** Chick-lit, popular culture, literary criticism, women’s fiction.

### **MAIN TEXT**

This research paper about chick-lit literature and its significance in the popular cultural context has the following major objectives: firstly, it aims to explore the genre’s significance for the research about popular fiction, thus for popular culture, and its relationship to literary and scholarly criticism. I consider chick-lit as a deeply contradictory genre that generates highly polarized responses, thus as a site of continuous struggle. To view chick-lit either from an entirely negative or positive perspective would be to oversimplify both the genre and the issues related to popular culture. Therefore, by considering both chick-lit’s wide appeal to its readers and denunciation by literary critics as trivial fiction, and exploring the positions taken up in academic and popular discussions about chick-lit, this paper seeks to examine the polarized responses and attempts to complicate the questions chick-lit raises regarding popular culture and contemporary socio-cultural realities of women. The paper also highlights the strengths and limitations of the genre in relation to literary values and cultural standards. Chick-lit’s incredible popularity as a cultural phenomenon is further investigated by drawing upon several critical debates introduced by Stuart Hall, Lawrence W. Levine, Michel de Certeau and John Fiske.

I explore chick-lit as a medium through which to view socio-cultural realities in contemporary world. A serious consideration of chick-lit reveals issues that many contemporary young women face in terms of identity, femininity, career and relationships, and exposes insights about contemporary women’s lives as they negotiate their expectations for career and relationships. The paper argues that, women use these popular cultural texts in making sense of their own social experience and construct relevances between the lines of the chick-lit novels and their own conditions of existence. By explicating the variety of ways in which chick-lit seeks to challenge cultural expectations about women as consumers, readers, writers, and about popular fiction itself, this paper

reveals how chick-lit's narratives can open up spaces for negotiating the contradictions of contemporary feminine subjectivities. Finally, it suggests that chick-lit should be seen as a necessary area of fiction by exploring its relationship to women's writing and reading practices.

The tremendously popular chick-lit fiction is very productive as an object of academic interest. As a commercially successful genre, it inevitably calls for a critical assessment of its status within literature and popular culture. The study of popular culture and chick-lit is closely connected, as popular culture explores how our leisure activities and entertainment define and shape the society, and chick-lit is both a product and reflection of the society. Chick-lit is a genre of popular fiction for young urban women. The term chick-lit is derived from the slang word "chick" for a young woman and "lit" which is short for literature. It is usually associated with young urban women's culture: Chick-lit books typically cover the lives of modern, cosmopolitan, single women in their 20s and 30s who place great emphasis on their dating relationships, careers and shopping. Sarah Mlynowski and Farrin Jacobs define the genre as: "often upbeat, always funny fiction about contemporary female characters and their everyday struggles with work, home, friendship, family or love. It's about observing life and finding the humor in a variety of situations and people" (10). The genre mainly depicts young women working in mainstream media, companies such as publishing houses, glossy fashion magazines, PR firms etc. (Mitchell and Reid-Walsh, 230). Some of the novels such as *Bridget Jones Diary*, take the form of a diary. Others use the confessional style of letters and e-mails, and the intimacy of first-person narrative. Almost all are written in a self-deprecating, funny, first-person voice. Taken as a whole, these works provide an interesting examination of images of women and their concerns in contemporary popular culture, while entertaining their readers.

According to Suzanne Ferriss and Mallory Young, the publication of Helen Fielding's *Bridget Jones Diary* in 1998 in the USA marks the beginning of a trend in women's popular fiction known as chick-lit (Ferriss and Young 2006: 2). Since the publication of *Bridget Jones's Diary*, chick-lit has been a rapidly growing popular cultural force and the publishers identified a profitable audience for confessional-style stories among women and created new brands of serials such as *Gossip Girl* (2000--), *The Princess Diaries* (2000--), *Shopaholic series*, as well as *The Nanny Diaries*, *The Botox Diaries* and *The Dirty Girls Social Club*. The genre has experienced amazing commercial success and has caused a "commercial tsunami" as Zernike indicates (1). Hundreds of chick-lit novels and short stories have been published, translated into many languages and became international bestsellers around the world in the last two decades.

Some writers and reviewers see these novels' roots in the heroine centered novels of the nineteenth century novels like Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*, and Jane Austen's *Nortanger Abbey* (Smith 7-8). Indeed, Austen's *Elizabeth*, *Emma* and *Elinor* share many of the same frustrations and anxieties as Fielding's Bridget, on the level of the everyday. Fielding readily admits her book was inspired by Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (Smith 7). However, chick-lit differs from those earlier novels by use of its humor, self-deprecation and more open attitudes toward sex and material consumer items. According to chick-lit novelist Melanie La'Brooy, chick-lit's greatest achievement is bringing humour into the contemporary women's scene ("Who's afraid of Bridget Jones?"). Indeed, the difference between chick-lit novels and their literary precedents is the ability of the modern protagonists to laugh at themselves so that chick-lit can treat women's issues with wit and insight. In relation to the significance of a comedic framework, Helen Fielding says:

It's good for women to be able to be funny about women and not to be afraid to be funny [...] Sometimes I've had people getting their knickers in a twist about Bridget Jones being a disgrace to feminism and so on. But the point is, it's good to be able to represent women as they actually are in the age you're living, [...] and laugh at ourselves without having a panic attack. (quoted in Jones, 2001)

Chick-lit has this mocking attitude toward the authority of the traditional literary fiction and its dominant culture in general. A glance at these books' candy-colored covers, handwritten-script like titles, cartoon like illustrations and graphics and their heavy marketing strategies lets the reader know that they are intended to be popular books, and makes it clear how these books are distinguished from the literary books. Whether these categories and distinctions are right or good is another issue, as is whether popular genres deserve more or less respect.

As a popular type of women's fiction, chick-lit has been seen similar to traditional romances such as Harlequin novels but, chick-lit protagonists are not like "the flawless women of romance fiction, waiting to be recognized by the perfect man, but women who make mistakes at work, sometimes drink too much, fail miserably in the kitchen" ("A Generational Divide Over Chick-lit"). In terms of desire, sexual agency and experience, chick-lit heroines seem to differ from the naive and innocent heroines of traditional romances. Unlike traditional romances, contemporary chick-lit doesn't always end in marriage, and the heroine's active social life outside a heterosexual relationship plays just as large a role in her life. Read this way, chick-lit can be seen as a contemporary ironic critique and subversion of the conventional romances with the romantic ideal of a woman being connected to a

single man. Furthermore, Anna Kiernan suggests that conventional romances were aimed at unemployed women being supported by men or women with low incomes. Chick-lit, on the other hand, is marketed to the urban single woman with a disposable income (208).

Chick-lit is in fact very controversial. As noted by cultural theorist and sociologist Stuart Hall, as a form of popular cultural text, chick-lit's structuring principles are the "tensions and oppositions" (461). The texts' huge appeal to contemporary female readers is contrasted by its total disparagement as trivial fiction in literary criticism, and very few critics have taken them seriously enough to study them in any detail (Ferriss and Young, 2006: 1-2). While the readers' acceptance and celebration of the genre is inevitable, the counter-forces at work dismissing the genre, such as the literary and scholarly apparatus which continually mark the difference between the valued "serious" literature and the "trivial" chick-lit, clearly demonstrate that the genre signifies a domain of cultural struggle and tension. Chick-lit seems to be dismissed from academic discourse as well. At a time when popular literature and culture of almost all forms have been accepted as a legitimate field of study by the academy, the reluctance is particularly apparent in the response to chick-lit's merits and flaws. ("A Generational Divide Over Chick-lit"). The reason why literary criticism does not think of it worthy of discussion or simply ignore the chick-lit fiction is presumably because of their preference for "high art" and rejection of pop culture due to the genre's tremendous popularity; its being seen as an object of consumption, lightweight, short-lived and highly marketed popular culture trend, rather than an object of art. The obvious commercial success of chick-lit, its high marketing strategies are probably seen as enemies that devalue real art and turn it into commercial entertainment. The idea of a novel as pure entertainment, then, is something which critics are especially hostile to. This view sees reading as an act of supporting the notions of high culture, and according to it, an individual's job when picking up a book should be an act of literary or cultural appreciation, rather than to look for amusement.

The critics who ignore the central concerns in the novels, tend to read the genre merely as popular literature for female readers who embrace consumer culture and girly goods, including designer clothes, expensive shoes, trendy accessories and the images of commodified femininity (Ragaisiene, 69). One example would be Cris Mazza who criticizes chick-lit as a genre populated by heroines "in endless self-doubt, depreciation, and blunder" (18-21). But such a view runs the risk of dismissing the genre's involvement of contemporary socio-cultural realities of women. "Produced by and for women", according to Ferriss and Young (2006: 12), the gendered nature of chick-lit can be one of the major reasons behind its dismissal. In her essay *Romance in the Stacks*, which appeared in the collection *Scorned Literature*, Alison M. Scott notes: "The scorn that contemporary romances garner relates substantively to the fact that romances are women's reading [...] Sociologists have long recognized a phenomenon called feminisation, which means that anything that becomes associated solely with women falls in general esteem" (217-8). This may explain why chick-lit novels, of which women are creators and consumers, are being subjected to harsh comments. Critically acclaimed novelist Doris Lessing has referred chick-lit as "instantly forgettable books" by remarking that "it's a pity that so many young women are writing like that" (quoted in Ezard, 2001: 7). Lessing further adds that "It would be better, perhaps, if [female novelists] wrote books about their lives as they really saw them and not these helpless girls, drunken, worrying about their weight" (quoted in Ezard, 2001: 7). Scarlett Thomas also mentions the genre's potential to eradicate all worthier forms of fiction, recommending that women should be protected from reading certain texts, as they should be encouraged to read others ("The Great Chick-lit Conspiracy"). Clearly these criticisms which urge women writers to write decent things and protect women from reading those, have a very prescriptive tone. This view automatically assigns anything concerning young women's lives to garbage. It also unavoidably suggests that readers are unknowing victims of manipulation and therefore incapable of making choices for themselves.

The situation about these particular anxieties around women's reading habits apparently is not new. Juliet Wells observes that "What women choose to read, and to write, have been hot topics in discussions of fiction, and in fiction itself, since the English novel came into being approximately three hundred years ago" (47). In relation to this, fictions perceived to be 'feminine' might be claimed to be seen less worthwhile than those seen as masculine, and arguably, a certain text does not hold the power to be a real threat to the more serious fiction and to corrupt its female readers. The relationship between what is authentically part of contemporary women's culture and what is provided for that culture by an organized, powerful industry is not a simple one (75). Thinking of the mass production behind the genre, there is no doubt that the cultural industries and publishers have found the chick-lit phenomena, profitable. There is a certain formulaic quality to most chick-lit novels that points to the industrial mass production as Mitchell and Reid-Walsh indicate (227), and the novels are attuned to the standards set by the commercial market. Considering the contextual issues surrounding the industry of chick-lit, it is certain that its marketing is tailored to a specific demographic, and in order to fulfill the high market demand, many books lacking quality and originality are published. In spite of my dissatisfaction with the way the certain formulas are applied in chick-lit, and the genre's focus on limited conceptions of women's lives and female empowerment, this criticism

could be applied to all genres. While many literary novels fail to achieve success, this can not be an excuse to condemn the entire genre of chick-lit. Like any genre that gives way to imitators, there is good chick-lit and bad chick-lit, books that sell well and those that disappear without a trace, just as there is good literary fiction and bad literary fiction. Therefore, I firmly think chick-lit is singled out with hostility. The prolific historian Lawrence W. Levine notes that, just because a popular cultural genre is formulaic, it does not necessarily mean that to know any part of it, is to know all of it (1374). He gives the example of Schubert or Beethoven quartets; that the reason we remember and appreciate those is not because they are a genre without any formulas, conversely, these composers succeeded within those formulas, and popular culture deserves the same possibilities (1374). Indeed, the texts of chick-lit novels may be formula-dominated but there is a creative variation of those formulas.

Chick-lit may be criticized by being denounced and dismissed, but it is undeniable that the genre is important as a media phenomenon and social sensation. The genre has a long historical origin and is actually a significant cultural mechanism. Also, analyzing the concepts of femininity developed in contemporary popular fiction and combining the chick-lit fiction with the historical fiction can make us understand how the discourse of marriage, sex, feminism, money evolved in the 200 years between Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* and Helen Fielding's *Bridget Jones's Diary*. Thus, a critical analysis of this popular fiction, due to its explicit commercial interest, show us that this popular fiction reflects and comments on contemporary social developments. Julia MacDonnell, an academic who sees value in chick-lit, argues that the genre is full of "witty, ironic stories about idiosyncratic heroines". The stories, she claims, are "not merely entertaining but also offering insights into how we live now" (qtd in Ward). Imelda Whelehan also argues that these popular novels, detailing the lives and concerns of contemporary young women, regard the impact of social and cultural factors such as consumerism, media images, plastic surgery and job opportunities, as well as the gender roles and self-identity (2005: 4-5). According to Whelehan, the genre reflects the anxieties of today's "transitional" women, who feel stress and ambivalence about identity, sexual agency and the attractions or perils of work, marriage, and motherhood (Whelehan 2005: 5). Indeed, the genre often depicts the romantic trials and tribulations of young, single, heterosexual, urban heroines, in their twenties or thirties. Ultimately, these novels are expressions of how women see each other, themselves, their relationships, work and family life. The novel *I Don't Know How She Does It* by Allison Pearson explicitly tackles the problems that young women face, struggling to balance challenging careers and personal lives centred on the pursuit for a satisfying romantic relationship. Whelehan notes that these novels document women's lives as they negotiate a shifting set of expectations for career and relationships (2005: 4-5). Indeed, chick-lit engages with and responds to the many contradictions and tensions between contemporary society and young women's lives. For instance, Carrie Bradshaw's column "Sex and the City" in the fictional New York Observer newspaper in Candace Bushnell's novel *Sex and the City*, is the product of her personal search to assess contemporary cultural and sexual norms for young women in Manhattan. "The question of the week" in her column which searches for the answers to questions such as how to remain friends with an ex-boyfriend and how many sexual partners are too many, represents the attempts of many real life contemporary women to investigate the struggles of modern relationship and gender roles on their own terms, and to determine their place within these relationships.

Chick-lit novels may also cause identification processes for women who look for emotional and social bonds with other women, by being more supportive and less competitive of each other. Many of these novels promote the value and benefits of female friendship and support, which might be considered as an empowering practice for girls and women that resist patriarchy. They can also be seen as a way to start dialogue about women's experience, for example, as Mitchell and Reid-Walsh remark "when young girls can share their understanding of teen literature with their mothers, there is a real potential for discussion of contemporary girl issues...Evaluating the space that crossover readers inhabit together can lead to a better understanding of how girl and womanhood are constructed" (253). This view illuminates how chick-lit could be used in literary and scholarly apparatus to explore generational differences in feminism. Therefore the genre can shed light on how both young girls and women make meaning and negotiate their identities through reading these popular cultural texts. Therefore, it is my contention that chick-lit is more than plain entertaining or marketing plans' of publishing industries, hence deserves a critical, scholarly consideration. Lawrence W. Levine asserts people's ability to refashion and reinterpret popular cultural texts created for them by the powerful, prescient producers to fit their own values, needs and expectations (1373-74). He further mentions audiences' processes of selection between what they found meaningful, appealing and functional and what they do not, in every popular genre. It is clear that the readers of *Bridget Jones* are not simply dupes and they cannot be regarded as passive, indiscriminating consumers addicted to trivial fictions. Rather, these women have found a space to explore their own similar feelings and experiences in their daily lives regarding gender roles, relationships, sexuality, career etc. within the ready-made characters of these popular cultural texts. In a similar way Levine underscores that we have to understand the realm of popular culture as a "profoundly close relationship between the audience and the meaning of the text" (1379), there is a dynamic connection that exists between the female readers and expressive chick-lit texts with which they interact.

The scenarios and dilemmas faced by the young women characters in the narratives of chick-lit novels can be exemplified by the dissatisfaction with their bodies and their relationships, mandates about the female body and their uncomfortableness with career aspirations. For instance, Bridget Jones turns to other magazines and programmes that give information to perfect her body through exercise, dieting etc. Only after perfecting her body according to these standards, she gets ready for her date. Consumer culture mediums from magazines to self-help books have a strong hold on Bridget's life. By sharing the details of her problematic relationships, her job, and failed attempts to reduce her consumption of alcohol, cigarettes and calories, she gains women's empathy. As Whelehan asserts, during this decade, young contemporary urban woman who embrace the traditionally masculine lifestyle choices such as excessive drinking, socializing and casual sex and indulge in the pleasures offered by consumer society, became current in popular culture (2000: 93). This clearly demonstrates that, the protagonists are not only the products of their authors', but they also reflect their reading audience. This connects the texts directly to their readers by inviting them to identify with the characters and situations portrayed, and to see them as reflective of their own lives in the way personal and social problems are handled. Arguably, this also means that chick-lit stays somewhere between artistic, literary fiction and escapist fiction.

Ferriss and Young argue that heroines of chick-lit novels elicit readers' identifications through their fallibility and self-deprecating humor, that is missing from the conventional romance novels (2006: 4). Conceivably, it seems reasonable to argue that the women who read these books are a lot like the women in them; young, relatively successful but somewhat insecure, prone to romantic and professional weaknesses, looking for fiction that serves as both entertainment and guiding map. As a flawed character Bridget Jones engages with many readers' empathy and recognition of their own feelings (Ferriss and Young, 2006: 4). According to media scholar John Fiske, viewers of media culture or readers of popular literature practice a selective style of apprehension, filtering out undesirable dominant ideology and adapting the original or obvious message for something that is more appropriate to their particular reality. He terms this way of reading, which focuses on what is relevant to the reader's circumstances, a resistance to the flood of mass culture (1987: 137-8). It can be claimed that chick-lit can be functional and relevant by reflecting women's lives as well as being entertaining. As Fiske asserts, in popular culture, social relevance and function are "far more powerful than textual structure" and "popular is functional" (1987: 105). Women use these popular cultural texts in making sense of their own social experience and thus coping with their contemporary, urban lifestyles in which they are caught up in between the contemporary modern lives and the traditions that still expect them to maintain a conventional femininity. The female readers accept the chick-lit texts according to their needs; these texts are functional and are of social use in meeting the negotiations and challenges that women's daily lives involve. The female readers construct relevances between these lines of the chick-lit novels and their own conditions of existence. In this respect, the enjoyment of books that may not be considered admirable in a literary sense, is still something worthy because they are functional. Arguably, what makes these books pleasing for readers is the way they negotiate the elements of contemporary women's lives and relationships in regard to men and to the offerings of consumerism, in humorous ways. In today's world, where women are expected to be smart and ambitious as well as stylish and snappy, these books are like friends and easy to relate to without being preachy. Surely, this research further needs an assessment of what readers think about the importance of chick-lit in their lives and in the culture at large, but upon evaluating the scholars' views, as well as the print and online book reviews, news articles, blogs and personal sites about chick-lit, this implication becomes evident.

In terms of feminism, some critics are disturbed by the genre's commercialized representations of femininity. The term 'chick' itself invokes immediate negative reactions. The term and reactions to it, point to some of the larger issues involved in responses to chick-lit. According to Ferriss and Young, the contemporary usage of this term signals infantilizing of women, girlyfied representations of grown women and a failure of their efforts to create a society based on gender equality (2007: 3). We see that debates on chick-lit are part of the struggle over the politics of representation of women, gender and sexuality. The reason for such criticism is probably due to the genre's depiction of women's liberation as purchasing power, the relationship between identity, sexuality and consumer capitalism, while lessening the need for social change to improve women's lives. One might bring in a subtle critique towards this criticism that, when a woman internalizes this attitude, in fact, she runs the risk of covering over her own experiences. As if women were not under enough pressure caught up in between the contemporary modern lives and the prescriptions that still expect them to maintain a traditional femininity, they have to worry about what the feminists will think when they want to read something entertaining and easy to relate to. Besides, chick-lit deals with issues essential to feminism, like the pressures on women about body mandates and balancing work with intimate relationships. The protagonist of Allison Pearson's *I Don't Know How She Does It* asks, "Back in the seventies, when they were fighting for women's rights, what did they think equal opportunities meant: that women would be entitled to spend as little time with their kids as men do?" Another example could be about the self-surveillance; although it can be heavily observed in Bridget Jones who confesses that she has

“been traumatized by supermodels”, these beauty routines and obsessive counting of calories is much parodied in later chick-lit. Again, oversized characters of Jennifer Weiner's novels, express their sorrow about the injustice of being measured against imposed physical beauty standards. Sophie Kinsella's *Confessions Of A Shopaholic* and the rest of the *Shopaholic* series, with their heroine driven into credit card debt by her shopping sprees, lead us to ask if female consumers are self-actualized agents or society's victims (“A Generational Divide Over Chick-lit”). Similarly, Sonia Singh's *Goddess for Hire*, one of the most popular South Asian American novels published in the U.S., is clearly a chick-lit novel, but considering the novel's excessive references to the protagonist Maya's indulgence in elite commodity consumption, it might also constitute a parody and subversion towards a number of chick-lit conventions, regarding materialism and consumer culture. Thus, somewhat paradoxically, it provides readers with a humorous break from the demands of being smart, trendy and sexy all at once, while it also subverts or satirizes chick-lit conventions. These examples clearly demonstrate that there are some features of these texts which can go beyond the efforts of their publishers to homogenize them for the sake of capitalism. In a variety of ways, then, chick-lit seeks to challenge cultural expectations about women as consumers, readers and writers, and about popular fiction itself. Thus, rather than seeing the genre as a betrayal to feminism, such examples suggest that chick-lit's narratives can also open spaces for negotiating the contradictions of contemporary feminine subjectivities. This makes clear that the genre, at least part of it, also attempts at revealing and reflecting the society that produced it and challenging the ideologies, rather than disseminating them like women's magazines. The French scholar Michel de Certeau argues that certain activities that are part of the “practices of everyday life” could be seen as tactical maneuvers or even forms of public rhetoric rather than passive behavior that signals acceptance of the status quo (18). By using these everyday practices, people in subordinate formations negotiate, challenge and oppose these structures. In a similar manner, it is likely that women enjoy the imaginative possibilities chick-lits offer, and indulge in empathetic experience that aids them in returning to and negotiating the challenges that they face in contemporary life. These texts become effective vehicles that their readers fit into a meaningful and significant context, depending on their own experiences, needs and expectations. In other words, women become “poachers” of textual meanings, (De Certeau, 175) by taking away the things that seem useful or pleasurable to them from those texts, in making sense of their own social experience and appropriating them to their own ends. The pleasures, entertainment and meanings provoked by the practice of chick-lit reading are multiple, and may be recognized as offering a space for cultural maneuver. Read this way, the practice of reading chick-lit may be considered as a minor feminine “tactical response that enable them to deal with it on a day-to-day level” (Fiske, 1989: 321) and as an act of negotiation of the everyday life structures in which women are caught up in between the contemporary modern lives and the traditions that still expect them to maintain a conventional femininity. I do not wish to propose that these actively engaging readers automatically mean that they are directly subversive or progressive, but at the very least, as John Fiske argues, such tricks are tactics that maintain the morale of the subordinate (1989: 321). Put another way, these popular cultural texts might offer a sort of enhanced morale to their women readers in their negotiations of daily life.

Stuart Hall underscores that, “There is no whole, authentic, autonomous ‘popular culture’ which lies outside the field of force of the relations of cultural power and domination” (460). Indeed, as formerly discussed, the power of cultural implantation by the mass production and the publishing industries behind the chick-lit genre should be acknowledged. These cultural industries and publishers ‘impose and implant’ those dominant or preferred culture (Hall 460). But on the contrary, this form of commercially provided popular culture is not purely manipulative and they don't function as if they are “blank screens” (Hall, 460). As we have seen, in chick-lit there are also “elements of recognition and identification, something approaching a re-creation of recognizable experiences and attitudes, to which people are responding” (Hall, 461). Denouncing the chick-lit novels as agents of mass manipulation and the capitalist cultural industries, hence the notion of the people as purely passive recipients does not provide us with an adequate account of cultural relationships formed around the genre. With these insights in mind, I conclude that chick-lit fiction, as a popular fiction, is a deeply contradictory site; a site of continuous struggle between “consent and resistance” (Hall, 466), since it functions in the domain of ‘popular’.

As previously mentioned, chick-lit writers also create protagonists who express critiques that suggest potential spaces for resistance and possible processes of disidentification for readers. For that reason, it seems reasonable to speak of the possibility that this popular genre might make its own significant interventions and critiques. In relation to this, Young and Ferriss mention chick-lit's surprising adaptability to diverse cultures: “Instead of continuing to get that very same Bridget Jones clone again and again, we're getting some different versions” (2006: 6-7). Since its flourishing from the late 1990s, other variations in the genre such as mum-lit, work-lit, slut-lit have also appeared as well as ethnic subgenres. “Chica-Lit and Sistah-Lit also tell stories about young women's individual empowerment, but the characters' engagements with femininity and gender are often articulated through questions of race, nation, ethnicity, and socioeconomic class” (Butler and Desai 4). Before dismissing the entire genre into one category as formulaic, one has to distinguish these subgenres from the mainstream, white-

dominated chick-lit and recognize how they differ from them in terms of occupation, politics of racial/ethnic identity, religion and plot. These subgenres are not identical to or derivative of white-dominated chick-lit. Thus, it might be suggested that there is much to be gained from these texts in terms of how "this literature operates in regard to race, nation, ethnicity, and socioeconomic class" (Butler and Desai, 27).

In the light of the preceding discussion, if we see chick-lit as a threat to "serious" literature and to the minds of its women readers, thus prescribe both readers and writers to engage in decent and serious reading and writing, then we dismiss and ignore the very important ways in which these popular cultural texts provide insight into cultural mechanisms, contemporary social developments and understandings of contemporary feminine subjects. Such dismissals also downplay the ways in which popular culture acts as a site of production of and contestation over meanings. The practice of reading chick-lit may speak for opposition as well as conformity to structures of power. The culture industry fostering chick-lit books for profit, heavy marketing techniques, formulaic qualities and cultural implantation by the publishing industries are all part of the chick-lit reality, but when looked beyond these, one can consider chick-lit as an important representation of modern women and issues that they face.

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