

Gender and Power in the Devil Wears Prada

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Abstract

The movie, The Devil Wears Prada, depicts female power in career, love, and friendship relationships in complex and often paradoxical perspectives. Female power relationships analyzed in the movie reveal that women use power effectively to compete in the world of business and to help other women advance in their careers; however, love and friendship relationships suffer as women succeed professionally. In spite of relationship challenges, such movies offer positive, strong female role model images for young women in the workforce.

Keywords: female power, rhetorical criticism, devil wears prada (the film), gender studies

1. Gender and Power in the Devil Wears Prada

The narrative of *The Devil Wears Prada* revolves around women. The main characters are women, as are the main sub-characters. They are women who are comfortable using power. Most female characters in the mass media “hold and use private power as wives, mothers, partners” (Ferguson, 1990, p. 218). *The Devil Wears Prada* is unusual in that the female characters are dominantly viewed in their roles as career women who use power effectively in the workplace. This research analyzes *The Devil Wears Prada* and argues that the main characters, Miranda and Andrea, symbolize two different societal role models for female power.

The story line is simple. A young woman fresh out of college is looking for her first job and her break into the world of journalism. A move to New York yields one job opportunity—second assistant to the editor of the number one fashion magazine. The experience changes the young woman’s life from her appearance to her connection to her primary relationships. In the end, the young woman walks away from the fashion world and finds a job at a traditional newspaper. The two main characters are the omnipotent fashion editor, Miranda Priestly (played by Meryl Streep) and the meek second assistant, Andrea Sachs (played by Anne Hathaway). The female sub-characters include the first assistant, Emily, and Andrea’s friend, Lily. There are minor male characters, a co-worker named Nigel, Andrea’s boyfriend, Andrea’s father, Miranda’s boss and, Miranda’s husband. While their time on the screen is minimal, their roles are influential as their actions trigger pivotal responses by the female characters.

2. The Devil Wears Prada

The movie, *The Devil Wears Prada*, was made from a screenplay by Aline Brosh McKenna based on the Lauren Weisberger novel of the same name. The novel was published in 2003 and by September, 2005, filming began (Song, 2005). Produced for \$35, by December, 2006, the movie had already grossed \$306.3 at the box office (Stanley, 2006). In January, 2007, the movie was the third best-selling DVD (Top DVD, 2007) and the second highest rented DVD (Top Video, 2007). The movie’s success reverberated in higher success for the book. In October, 2006, the book was produced in audio form and was third in the top—selling fiction audio books (Maughan, 2006). By January, 2007, it was the second most borrowed book in U.S. libraries (Books Most Borrowed, 2007) and the eighth best-selling book (Blais, 2007).

The movie version of *The Devil Wears Prada* transmits powerful messages of how women use power. It is important to note distinctions between the movie and book revisions in order to understand why the movie version was chosen for this analysis. The movie story line is different from that of the novel. Some reviewers thought the movie was better than the book.

Lee (2006) liked the movie story line and wrote, “AlineBrosh McKenna’s script is shrewd about what it takes to ascend to and command the pinnacle of the spectacle industry: demanding the impossible with the utmost severity and *meaning* it” (p. 72). Whereas the movie adds dimension to the Miranda character, the novel focuses attention on the assistant, poor Andrea. “The mythic changes effected in Miranda Priestly’s character by the film are part of an adaptation that gives Andy’s story a physical immediacy the print medium cannot and achieves a little gender latitude in the history of women-at-work films” (Nochimson, 2006, p. 48). The focus of the novel addresses what Wolf (1994) describes as “women are managing, criticizing, and firing other women, and their employees sometimes, understandably, hate their guts” (p. 207). Nochimson (2006) notes this difference in a dramatic scene when Miranda publicly chastises Andrea for thinking she is not influenced by fashion industry decisions. Nochimson (2006) states “this speech and a number of other features original to the film elevate Miranda from the book’s whining bitch to a figure of mythic power” (p. 48). Mendez (2006) also notes the change in Miranda’s character in the movie version. Mendez states, “Streep’s character is rendered human and equitable, lending the film a depth and dimensionality sorely absent from the book” (p. 12). In addition, a key story element is added to the movie. Andrea demonstrates loyalty to Miranda when she tried to warn her about the coup that was going to topple Miranda, replacing her with a younger woman. Key similarities between the movie and the novel are the ways Andrea is helped by her co-worker Emily as she learns her new job.

Reviews of the movie praised the acting and the production of the movie. A few reviews identify the deeper messages transmitted through the movie. Lee (2006) identifies such a message by writing, “*The Devil Wears Prada* is motivated by two fantasies: gaining power, experience, confidence, and opportunity in the glamour scene; and rejecting it all for life in a scummy one-bedroom pitching earnest articles to serious publications” (p. 72). Kauffman (2006) identifies a different message, that of American morality. His review states:

[i]n *Devil* an idealistic young woman comes to New York and gets a job: exciting and prestigious, but not what she had been aiming for. After a certain amount of success and disgust, she shucks the golden shackles....The heroine of *Devil* wants to be a serious journalist, gets caught in the glitzy maelstrom, but finally cuts loose (p. 20).

Nochimson (2006) uses mythic language in her review of *The Devil Wears Prada* words such as, “Miltonian,” “Olympian moment,” “puritanical,” and refers to ancient mythologies such as *Paradise Lost* and the *Golden Fleece*; even Hercules is referenced. These are grand, powerful words and references used in describing one’s reaction to watching this movie. Nochimson wrote: “through Miranda, the film is a standard Hollywood exercise in mystification of the usual suspects: women’s bodies and women’s power” (p. 49). This movie resonates with deep messages. “And what was sold as silly chick lit all of sudden turns into a delightfully knowing and sympathetic portrait of working women,” according to Valby (2006, p. 1).

3. Gender and Power

Power and women are popular topics in movies. Lee (2006) identifies power as the center of *The Devil Wears Prada*. Cunneen (2006) also finds this movie is about power, “you wouldn’t want to work for Miranda, but she is a fascinating emblem of power and professionalism” (p. 16). Nochimson (2006) also references power in her review of the movie. She states:

[i]n *Prada* good women aren’t gorgeous, economic systems disappear as the root causes of social phenomena, and the real stunners are in league with Satan. Because this time the mystification is in the form of power of a magisterial woman, the film titillates liberated women’s fantasies... (p. 50).

The Devil Wears Prada offers working women a strong role model in the character of Miranda. The character of Miranda expresses female power and evokes power with every verbal and nonverbal action. For example, every shot in the opening of the movie deliberately creates the aura of power—from the fashionable items that only lots of money could buy to the large personal nonverbal space required by this woman editor, Miranda. The powerful Miranda arrives in the offices of Runway magazine (Finerman, 2006) in the opening scene. Following is a description of this scene. In an office setting, a cell phone rings. Emily cries: Oh my God...no, No, NO! Cut to the New York street where an expensive car pulls up to the curb. The door opens and a female leg wearing designer shoes steps out. Cut to close-ups of a fashion magazine, a Prada handbag, then to a three-quarter shot of a woman in a fur coat walking into an elevator. Quickly, a model exits the elevator while apologizing to Miranda for being too close. Cut to a frontal shot of Miranda taking off her sunglasses and walking out of the elevator.

Her gaze is confident and direct. Miranda exudes power. Various reviews captured examples of her mannerisms and behavior to visualize female power. These descriptions focus on her quietly powerful voice; her use of crisp, dismissive language; and her expressive face (Ansen, 2006; Collis, 2006; Does Their Real Life, 2006; Rozen, 2006; Spencer, 2006; Valby, 2006).

The setting in *The Devil Wears Prada* is the fashion world. It is portrayed as a superficial world. It should not be taken as seriously as the “real” business world. “Dividing women and portraying them as ‘silly’ maintains the status quo that portrays the dominant codes (male) as reasonable and right and the alternative (women fighting for equal rights—or worse) as insignificant” (Beck, 1998, p. 145). The polysemic nature of movies allows multiple interpretations of messages (Cooper, 2000; Solomon & McMullen, 1991; Fiske, 1986). In the movie women can be portrayed as “silly” because the setting is the world of fashion while at the same time Miranda can be portrayed as all-powerful.

The surface message in *The Devil Wears Prada* focuses on the fashion world. Being pretty is superficial and unimportant. It takes women away from important things such as meeting the needs of others—boyfriend, friend, family. Miranda is the pinnacle of that world and thus she is labeled the “Devil.” Initially, Andrea is drawn into that world but in the end she is presented as someone who comes to her senses and saves herself. The deeper message in the movie is that Miranda has power. She is proficient at using power even though she may not always be nice. The movie presents a view that women like Miranda do not have to be nice when using power. Wolf (1994) identifies the dragon of niceness as a problem for women. According to Wolf (1994) women shy away from expressing power because they want to be perceived as being nice. In addition, Wolf (1994) suggests that women share seven common fears of power: “the Fears of Leadership, Egotism, Ridicule, Conflict, Standing Alone, Having Too Much Fun, and Seeing Other Women Have Too Much” (p. 274).

Movies reflect the dominant narratives of society and they also reveal subordinate or developing narratives within society. These different narratives can reinforce existing behavior or serve as role models for young women searching for direction. “With their ability to depict, define, and discount, the media serve as powerful agents of gender...” (Ward & Harrison, 2005, p. 14). Baldwin & Kapoor (2004) define gender as “the social construction of how men and women should behave, what they should value, and so on” (p. 165). Examination of a movie’s message reveals the potential influences on society. Specifically, women of all ages and young girls are target audiences of movies labeled “chick flicks.” “For girls working to develop an understanding of the female role, media images and models are virtually unavoidable” (Ward & Harrison, 2005, p. 15). The influence by the media on women’s views of their own roles within society is pervasive and influential. Previous research demonstrated that feminist interpretations can be drawn from movies (Dow & Condit, 2005; Cooper, 2000). Sultze (2003) states “the liberal feminist notion of empowerment and change through equal opportunities, equal employment, and equal voice—but within the existing social structures and media systems—may not provide everything that is needed for a reformed, different vision of women” (p. 287). Positive role models—powerful women—are needed in the mass media. Studies of television sitcoms’ portrayal of women reveal that women enjoy narratives of empowered women (D’Acci, 1995; Sowards&Renegar, 2004). Johnson (2007) states “One of the specific ways that post-feminism accomplishes the association of women’s interests with the establishment is through images of liberated and powerful women” (p. 169). Sowards&Renegar (2004) found:

[t]hird wave feminism enacted in popular culture and through the mass media serves to raise consciousness by allowing individuals to engage in moments of identification and private reflection, even when these texts are consumed in public settings. Furthermore, many of these feminist-minded audiences are able to focus on messages of empowerment, while simultaneously rejecting messages of sexualization or objectification. Consciousness-raising, then, provides a critical framework where audiences problematize texts rather than passively accept their messages (pp. 547-548).

“Feminist critics have consistently taken issue with how the popular media represents the power of women” (Johnson, 2007, p. 169).

A major principle in feminist criticism is patriarchy. Power is at the heart of a patriarchal society predominantly residing with males. Foss (1996) describes it as follows:

[p]atriarchy is a system of power relations in which men dominate women so that women's interests are subordinated to those of men, and women are seen as inferior to men. In a patriarchal society, relations of domination between women and men exist in all institutions and social practices, so we all learn patriarchal values and modes of operation as appropriate and natural and thus help to perpetuate them (p. 166).

The balance of power and who controls power is a dominant force in feminist criticism (Johnson, 2007; Allen, 1999; Wolf, 1994).

Wolf (1994) argues that women can approach power from two different feminist perspectives: victim feminism or power feminism. The woman who adopts a victim perspective has “a psychology of scarcity” and believes that “one woman's gain is another's loss” (Wolf, 1994, pp. 137-138). The woman who adopts a power perspective “seeks power and uses it responsibly...for women as individuals;” “exerts her power more effectively;” “acknowledges women's interest in ‘signature,’ recognition, and fame;” and “acknowledges that aggression, competitiveness...even the danger of selfish...behavior, are as much a part of female identity as are nurturant behaviors” (Wolf, 1994, pp. 137-138). Wolf (1994) encourages women to “challenge the impulse to shy away from acknowledging the power, or admitting to the leadership skills, that we [women] possess” (p. 317). She believes that women need to be less “power averse” and more “power literate.”

Wolf (1994) states: “a woman is entitled to define herself, express her beliefs, and make her own life” (p. 127). In the movie, Miranda did this. Andrea took steps to “make her own life.” Initially, she received support from her father, boyfriend, and best female friend. This changed a few months into the job. Her father was worried that his smart daughter who had turned down a scholarship to go to law school in order to be a journalist was working as an assistant at just a fashion magazine. He expressed concern that this job was taking over her whole life. Her friends wanted her to stay the same while expecting her support for their career choices.

4. Female Power in *The Devil Wears Prada*

The Devil Wears Prada portrays the dualism of female power in society. It is argued that the characters of Miranda and Andrea symbolize two different societal models of female power. Miranda wants power and she is not afraid to succeed. She knows what she wants and she is smart enough to get it. Andrea represents the struggle many women face. She wants to succeed but she is afraid of claiming power and recognition. She wants everyone to like her.

4.1. Miranda as the Voice of the Power Feminism Society

Miranda is a power feminist. Miranda represents the subordinate narrative of women and power in society. It is okay for women to have power and use power. Women can be effective stewards of power. It is okay for a woman to put herself first. Women do not have to be “nice” in order to use power and be successful. Women can and do help other women to achieve power and status. Women can and do build effective power networks. There are deeper messages imbedded in this movie. Power was used effectively and comfortably by the women in *The Devil Wears Prada*. The rhetoric of the movie transforms the role of powerful women in society. The character of Miranda provides a role model for other women. It is okay to want power. It is okay to use power effectively. It is okay to use power to advance your career. It is okay to use power to advance other women in their careers.

4.2. Andrea as the Voice of the Patriarchal Society

Andrea is a product of a patriarchal society and has thus become its voice. Andrea represents the dominant narrative of women and power in society. Because she has low power in society the character of Andrea is used to absorb the full force of society's expectations for how women with power should be viewed. The main people in her life represent society's expectations. Society's viewpoint is evidenced in this movie by the characters of her father, boyfriend, and best female friend. The lack of support from her father, boyfriend, and her best female friend are difficult for Andrea. She is trying to start her career and her primary networks of support are not supporting her. Instead, they tell her that she has chosen her career over her friends and family. Unfortunately, this is not atypical for young women starting their careers or for any career woman no matter what the age. This divide is not just about Andrea wearing the latest fashion apparel. This divide has more to do with a female putting herself first; in this case, starting her career and trying to get her foot in the door. Women are supposed to do what their parents want them to do, be available and supportive to their boyfriend's wishes, and not be any different from their female friends.

In the end, Andrea concedes defeat to her boyfriend's expectations by telling him that "he was right about everything. [She] turned her back on her friends and everything she believed in" (Finerman, 2006). Andrea even apologized. She told her boyfriend that she put her job first instead of him. She wore designer apparel and was more concerned about being pretty than the real, important things in life. The character of Andrea changes under the impress of social pressure. She conforms to the role of the "good" woman. Ironically, in the same conversation, her boyfriend tells Andrea that he got his break as a sous-chef at a restaurant in another state and he was leaving. Andrea, of course, was happy and supportive of him. He never considered how this decision might affect her and their relationship. As a female, Andrea was supposed to support him. She did.

Andrea conformed at the end. "Andy gets back into her studenty clothes and makes up with her boyfriend before being interviewed by a paternal boss in a drab office" (Spencer, 2006, p. 50). Andrea left the superficial unimportant world of fashion; left the sphere of a powerful woman who was obviously evil; left it all for dowdy clothes, a job at a traditional newspaper writing stories about important issues; and most important of all, to work for a male who, according to the patriarchal society's perspective, is the best keeper of power. The role of Andrea tells women that it is better for a woman to work for a man rather than another woman. Andrea's final choice represents society's accepted role for women with power. Andrea is also used to contrast society's negative view of women with power. Society tells the Andrea's of the world that women really should not have too much power because if you do you will be portrayed as a Miranda. The Miranda's of the world are labeled with negative names and a pay high personal price for their successful use of power. This type of message is dominant in patriarchal narratives and it exerts an influence on young women who may think twice before becoming "too" powerful. In *The Devil Wears Prada*, two societal views were portrayed, the dominant patriarchal view (as represented by Andrea), and the subordinate power feminist view (as represented by Miranda). Andrea had to leave her job working for Miranda in order to sustain the dominant patriarchal view of the world. In this patriarchal society, Andrea had to conform. The movie might not have been so successful if the subordinate view "won."

In addition to portraying the dualism of female power in society, *The Devil Wears Prada* also depicts female power in relationships. Career, love, and friendship relationships are further examined by capturing movie scenes that illustrate female power.

4.3. Female Power Relationships: Career

4.3.1. Miranda and Andrea. Four messages are drawn out of movie scenes to demonstrate how power was exercised through the characters of Miranda and Andrea. In the first message, Miranda notices Andrea's defense of herself and hires her to be her assistant and later notices when Andrea begins to look and act professional. In the second message, Miranda saved her own career while helping another woman advance. In the third message, Andrea is offered the opportunity to go to Paris and is later torn by her decision to advance. In the fourth message, Miranda supports Andrea in her new career choice and helps her get a job.

4.3.1.1. Miranda notices Andrea. Miranda and Andrea first met during the interview. Miranda kept working while Andrea awkwardly tried to explain why she should be hired. Nigel, Miranda's male employee, walked in and began to talk with Miranda about the magazine. They both ignored Andrea. Andrea started to leave the room, then turned around and defiantly stood up for herself. This action grabbed Miranda's attention. She stopped what she was doing and looked at her closely. Andrea was hired because she showed spunk and demonstrated the ability to speak up for herself. A powerful character like Miranda noticed this flare of independence. In another scene when Andrea had improved her professional appearance with designer clothes, Miranda again stopped what she was doing and noticed Andrea's new look. She was talking on the phone but spun around and focused intensely on Andrea as she walked out of the room. Miranda noticed when Andrea began to take her job seriously and tried to assimilate into the fashion world.

4.3.1.2. Miranda saves her career. A critical point in the movie's narrative is when Herve, chairman of Elias-Clarke Publications (the company that owns *Runway* magazine), decided to replace Miranda as editor with a younger female, Jacqueline, because he thought she had fresher ideas and would produce the magazine with less expense. A patriarchal approach would have the two women end up in a hair-pulling fight, typical of a popular talk-show. Instead, the women act professionally and exemplify the view that there is enough opportunity for success for all women. Miranda did not destroy her competition. Instead, Miranda saved her own career while also promoting another woman.

In the end, Nigel, the male subordinate, had to wait for his promotion because Miranda gave Jacqueline the position. Nigel assumes the traditional female role. Work hard, take little credit, and wait patiently for the boss to decide when and if a promotion should be awarded.

Miranda was able to save her job as editor of *Runway* because she knew how to use power and she was not afraid to do so. Miranda built her own power networks. This is what men have been doing for ages (Wolf, 1994). Miranda selected young designers and others in the fashion industry and nurtured their careers. In the end, when Herve wanted to replace Miranda as editor, Miranda provided a list of all the fashion people who would walk away from the magazine with her. The magazine would have been destroyed. Herve had no choice but to keep Miranda because it was good business. In her triumphant moment, Miranda provided Jacqueline, her younger female rival, an opportunity for career advancement by making her the president of new designer company. Instead of making an enemy, Miranda was able to add Jacqueline to her list of younger fashion leaders who were indebted to her.

The plot to replace Miranda with Jacqueline is discovered by Andrea when she spends the night in Paris with her lover, Christian, a good-looking writer in the fashion world. In the new organizational structure, Christian will be in charge of editorials when Jacqueline is editor. Andrea is devastated for Miranda. By this point, Andrea had already discovered that, "...there actually is something to be learned from her cool and demanding mentor" (Mendez, 2006, p. 12). Andrea even defended Miranda in a conversation with Christian. Andrea stated, "She's tough. But if Miranda were a man, no one would notice anything except how great she is at her job" (Finerman, 2006). Andrea tried to protect and help Miranda when she thought Miranda was going to be replaced. Andrea's character portrays the mixed view on women with power. By defending Miranda, Andrea supports Miranda's ability to wield power. Ironically, Andrea also tried to make feel Miranda guilty about saving herself at the expense of Nigel. By trying to make Miranda feel guilty Andrea also expresses the view in society that it is okay for women to express power as long as a male is not negatively affected. Miranda shows Andrea it is okay to use power to be competitive and advance one's career, even save one's career even if that means a male does not get his promotion. In this scene, Andrea is at a crossroads. Should she follow the lead of Miranda or play it safe and retreat to the patriarchal view? By the end of the movie, Andrea took a job at a traditional newspaper—leaving the back-stabbing world of fashion.

4.3.1.3. Andrea chooses advancement. Andrea was offered an opportunity to go to Paris. She chose to advance by competing against another female, Emily, for the position. When Andrea tried to make Miranda feel guilty about not promoting Nigel, Miranda reminded Andrea of her own decision to compete against Emily when Andrea accepted the offer to go to Paris. In other words, Andrea chose self-preservation and career advancement just as Miranda did. She was telling Andrea to grow up and realize that to succeed sometimes you have to choose yourself over someone else. This is a message that is hard for Andrea to accept. She is torn. On one hand, a successful, powerful woman is telling her it is okay to be competitive and succeed. On the other hand, society's patriarchal voice is telling her that nice girls should not be competitive. By the end of the movie, Andrea must choose one option. The following conversation in the car exemplifies the power dualism portrayed in the movie (Finerman, 2006):

Miranda: You thought I didn't know. I've known what was happening for quite some time. It just took me a little while to find a suitable alternative for Jacqueline. The James Holt job was so absurdly overpaid; of course she jumped at it. [laugh] So, I just had to tell Herve that Jacqueline was unavailable. Truth is there is no one that can do what I do, including Herve. Any of the other choices would have found that job impossible and the magazine would have suffered, especially because of the list. The list of designers, photographers, editors, writers, models; all of whom were found by me, nurtured by me, and have promised me they would follow me whenever and if ever I choose to leave *Runway*. [laugh] So he reconsidered. But I was very, very impressed by how intently you tried to warn me. I never thought I would say this Andrea, but I really...see a great deal of myself in you. You can see beyond what people want, what they need and you can choose for yourself.

Andrea: I don't think I'm like that. I couldn't do what you did to Nigel, Miranda. I couldn't do something like that.

Miranda: You already did. To Emily.

Andrea: That was different. I didn't have a choice.
Miranda: Oh no, you chose. You chose to get ahead. You want this life. Those choices are necessary.
Andrea: But what if this isn't what I want? What if I don't want to live the way you live?
Miranda: Oh, don't be ridiculous, Andrea. Everybody wants this. Everybody wants to be us.

4.3.1.4. Miranda supports Andrea's career choice. Andrea rejected Miranda's worldview. Without saying a word, Andrea walked off the job in Paris. When she applied for a job at a traditional newspaper, the male interviewer called Miranda for a reference. Miranda could have easily refused or given a negative evaluation. Instead, she faxed this message: "Of all the assistants she has ever had, [Andrea] was by far her biggest disappointment. And if he [the newspaper editor] does not hire her, he is an idiot" (Finerman, 2006). This statement was a huge endorsement by a powerful fashion editor. The newspaper editor interviewing Andrea said, "You must have done something right" (Finerman, 2006). Miranda was so powerful that her word could get anyone a job anywhere. In this case, Miranda helped Andrea get another job even though Andrea had abruptly quit without notice.

After getting the job, Andrea walks down the streets of New York and sees Miranda getting into her car. They stare at each other—Andrea smiles and waves while Miranda gives her an icy stare. Once inside the car, Miranda looks closely at Andrea across the street. She takes her sunglasses off and she smiles while looking upward and gives an almost silent, happy sound. Miranda demonstrated that she would help another woman holding a different worldview on power even though she chose not to reveal her emotions to Andrea.

4.3.2. Co-workers. The relationships of Andrea and two co-workers, Emily and Nigel, are also examined for the ways in which female power is portrayed in the movie. The first message includes movie scenes in which Emily helps Andrea, and later when Andrea helps Emily. The second message includes movie scenes in which Andrea turns to Nigel for help.

4.3.2.1. Andrea and Emily. Mass media often portray female co-workers as unsupportive of each other and often even engaged in behavior to sabotage the other. Verbal insults veiled in "catty" verbal styles are often heavily used. Kauffmann (2006) noted the use of such verbal styles in his review of *The Devil Wears Prada*: "the specific place is a slick magazine called Runway, and the air around it is filled with the slash of verbal rapiers and stilettos, lunging and parrying" (p. 20). Even with such negative verbal styles the female co-workers, Emily and Andrea support each other in *The Devil Wears Prada*.

Emily is the first assistant and Andrea is the second assistant. Through her sarcasm, Emily trains Andrea. She is thorough and detailed. From the very beginning, Emily does not try to sabotage Andrea. Beneath the sharp language styles, Emily tries to help Andrea. In their first meeting during her interview with Miranda, when Andrea started to walk into the office carrying a lumpy, ugly briefcase, Emily grabs the briefcase from Andrea and throws it under the desk. In her way, Emily was trying to help Andrea make a good impression with Miranda. This support was even evident in the book version. The book described the women in the workplace as nice and helpful to the new assistant (Weisberger, 2003). In another scene from the movie version, Emily took time to thoroughly explain what Andrea needed to do and especially not do the first time Andrea delivered the book (mock of the next issue of the magazine) at Miranda's house. A patriarchal approach would set the stage for Emily to give Andrea incorrect instructions in an attempt to embarrass her or to get her fired. Emily demonstrated professionalism.

At the end of the movie, after Andrea accepted the traditional newspaper job, Andrea calls Emily in the office and asks her for a favor—to take the designer clothes from Paris off her hands. Andrea is being helpful to Emily because the clothes will help Emily's career immensely. Emily expresses her usual sarcastic verbal responses to Andrea while the audience sees the tears well up in her eyes. Immediately after the phone call, Emily barks at the new second assistant, "You have some very large shoes to fill. I hope you know that!" (Finerman, 2006).

4.3.2.2. Andrea and Nigel. One male co-worker is featured in the movie. Nigel is "a homosexual man without a trace of cartoon—shrewd, skilled, and weathered without being worn" (Kauffman, 2006, p. 20). Nigel is Miranda's trusted employee who gives invaluable fashion advice for the magazine. In one scene, Andrea turns to Nigel to complain about her job being so hard and Miranda being so mean and that a fashion magazine is not where she wants to be. Nigel gives her a fatherly lecture and essentially tells her to grow up because Miranda is doing her job while Andrea is not even trying to do her own job well.

Valby (2006) reviewed the movie and stated: “it offers a wise rebuke to the parent-subsidized upstarts who come waltzing into a workplace at 23 expecting a break” (p. 73). Andrea does not get the sympathy she was expecting. Nigel then begins the challenge of transforming Andrea’s outward image into that of a sophisticated professional. It is ironic that a male is used to help a woman find her beautiful, confident, and professional side.

4.4. Female Power Relationships: Love

Three messages are drawn from movie scenes to examine the expression of power in love relationships and how the women’s love relationships suffer. In the first message, Miranda is seen as emotionally vulnerable because of her relationship with her husband. The next two messages involve Andrea and her boyfriend and then Andrea and her father.

4.4.1. Miranda and husband. Miranda is a powerful career woman who works to make time to be with her husband, Steven, and their daughters. While powerful men are not judged by how much time they spend with their families this female character is supposed to try to be everything—successful at career, and as a mother and wife. Miranda is a powerful role model for women wielding power in their career yet this movie also portrays the view that women are supposed to have a family and take care of them. A powerful woman like the character of Miranda is just as vulnerable to the pain of love as any other less powerful woman. Miranda has been divorced before. She is all powerful in the fashion world and at her magazine. She gives the orders and does not listen to any reasons why someone was not able to do what she wanted. She is the boss. In her personal life she is portrayed as intensely private, yet two scenes reveal vulnerability. The first scene places her husband in the position of power. The second scene reveals her devotion to her children.

The first scene is when Andrea delivers the book (mock of the next issue of the magazine) to Miranda’s home for the first time. She mistakenly walks upstairs trying to figure out where to place the book. Unintentionally, she overhears a fight between Miranda and her husband. Her husband is angry because he felt that Miranda deliberately embarrassed him at the restaurant by being late for dinner. Miranda is desperately trying to explain why she was late to dinner—there was no cell phone reception and so she could not call him. He refuses to listen and walks away from her. When Miranda notices that Andrea is there and listening to the private conversation she freezes and gives her an astonished, icy stare. Andrea put the book on the step and left quickly. In this scene, Miranda is the one who did not complete a task—meeting her husband on time in the restaurant for dinner. Miranda is the one who is trying to explain this failure. Her husband does not listen to her explanations and ends the conversation by walking away. Miranda is a woman who has absolute power in her professional life and yet in her personal life she is treated in a dismissive fashion by her husband.

The second scene takes place in Paris. Andrea walks into the hotel suite where she finds Miranda waiting. Miranda is without make-up, her eyes are swollen from crying and she appears vulnerable as she tells Andrea that her husband left her and there will be another divorce. Andrea is amazed to see Miranda in this state as she has never seen her in any state other than complete control. Miranda expresses concern for her daughters when the press gets hold of this story. She does not care what the media says about her as she is used to such negative press. However, she does not want her daughters to feel any pain from the negative media coverage. Miranda states, “I don’t care what anyone writes about me. But the girls. It’s just so unfair. Another disappointment. Another let-down. Another father-figure” (Finerman, 2006). Again, the all-powerful professional Miranda is wounded in her personal life. Her husband has rejected their life together. Her daughters may suffer from the media onslaught. The media cannot hurt her directly anymore, yet they can hurt those she loves, her daughters.

Another element from this scene involves the fact that Miranda opened up to Andrea about her personal life. She took off her make-up as if that were a shield to protect her or to keep others from seeing her deeper emotions. She allowed Andrea to see behind that shield. Andrea is her assistant, not her equal, yet by opening up she is reaching out to another female in her time of personal suffering. So, power has its place. In the workplace there is a clear chain of command. On personal issues women can talk to each other. When Andrea asked, “Is there anything else I can do?” the all-powerful Miranda takes charge again and replies with a nod and a curt statement, “Your job. That’s all” (Finerman, 2006). The powerful Miranda is in control again.

The scenes of personal vulnerability in *The Devil Wears Prada* “...gracefully examine the price a powerful woman has to pay for her success” (Valby, 2006, p. 73). Amiel (2006) blames Hollywood for depicting “powerful and talented beings as human failures” (p. 79).

Amiel states, “Miranda, after all—and this is key—is lonely. She is a woman with no friends, a husband who has left her, and only the cold comfort of her children, a posh suite at a Paris hotel, an Upper East Side Manhattan townhouse, a powerful job she adores, and a salary of a million bucks” (p. 78). So, the price a powerful woman pays for her professional success is reduced personal happiness littered with broken relationships.

4.4.2. Andrea and boyfriend. Andrea’s boyfriend, Nate, makes fun of her job because in his view the fashion world is not important. Very early into the job and during a night out with her friends, Andrea’s cell phone rings with a call from Miranda. Her boyfriend grabs her cell phone and tosses it to their friends who play a game of keeping the cell phone away from Andrea. Andrea gets upset, grabs the phone back and leaves. Her friends are mystified by her angry reaction. This scene sets the stage for later in the movie when her boyfriend and best female friend tell Andrea that she’s changed and they do not like the changes. These important relationships are threatened by the personal and professional growth that Andrea is experiencing. They don’t want Andrea to change even though her friends can change and advance in their careers. It is not a two-way street.

Andrea’s boyfriend places constant pressure on Andrea to quit her job. He is angry when she works late and misses his birthday party. He is angry when Miranda calls on the cell phone while he and Andrea are fighting. He is angry that Andrea is not available to him all the time. All is forgiven each time Andrea plays the role of the sexual object. Nate cannot keep his hands off Andrea the first time he sees her dressed in a sexy designer outfit. In another scene when they are having a fight Andrea opens her blouse to reveal a sexy bustier and amazingly, the fight ends.

4.4.3. Andrea and father. Andrea’s father visited her in New York. During their dinner, he gives a check to cover the rent and then proceeds to make her feel guilty for taking this job. He argues that he and her mother do not understand why she gave up a scholarship to law school to pursue journalism especially since she is not even working in journalism. In her father’s mind fashion is not journalism and she has no future. In addition, this unimportant position is taking over her life and he does not see that as good. Even when Andrea explains that this is her break into the journalism world and that after one year she can work at any magazine, her father still does not understand or accept her choice. He combines guilt and a lack of understanding and support for her choices in exchange for his continued financial support. Andrea is faced with the fact that she is disappointing her father as long as she builds her career in the fashion world.

4.5. Female Power Relationships: Friendship

Andrea’s relationship with friends is captured in scenes with her best female friend, Lily. Lily represents a negative pressure in Andrea’s life. She is Andrea’s friend but only if Andrea stays in the mold defined by Lily.

4.5.1. Andrea and Best Friend, Lily. Initially, Lily makes fun of Andrea when she was hired as an assistant to the editor at the fashion magazine. Later, Lily is excited, happy, and supportive of Andrea’s new job when Andrea gave Lily expensive fashionable gifts; items rejected by Miranda. Andrea is seen as a loyal friend to Lily. When Lily gets a break in her career and organizes an art event at the gallery, Andrea attends. At the art opening, Lily sees Christian, a good-looking, male writer from the fashion industry, making romantic gestures toward Andrea who flirted back. Andrea noticed Lily watching them and she then rushed to Lily’s side to try to explain that Christian was just someone from her work. Lily did not believe Andrea nor did she give her a chance to further explain. Instead, Lily verbally attacked Andrea and angrily stated that she did not know who Andrea had become. Andrea was exploring, building her career, and she was changing. Her friend Lily did not want Andrea to change. Ironically, Lily was succeeding in her career with support from Andrea but that support was not reciprocated by Lily.

5. Role Models in the Devil Wears Prada

The movie, *The Devil Wears Prada*, depicts female power in career, love, and friendship relationships in complex and often paradoxical perspectives. Female power relationships analyzed in the movie reveal that women use power effectively to compete in the world of business and to help other women advance in their careers; however, love and friendship relationships suffer as women succeed professionally. In spite of relationship challenges, such movies offer positive, strong female role model images for young women in the workforce. This popular movie certainly can be interpreted in multiple ways by the viewers as well as by researchers. In fact, the polysemic nature (Fiske, 1986) of *The Devil Wears Prada* probably contributes to its popularity.

Many viewers can find a message to which they can identify. This popular movie targeted a wide audience. There are probably viewers who support Andrea's decision to get away from the "bad" influence of Miranda. There are also probably viewers who support Miranda in her success while understanding the pressures Andrea faced. In the end neither Andrea nor Miranda were portrayed as losers; both were presented as winners. Both characters were successful in their chosen paths. Both characters offer women models for expressing their power. It is up to the viewer to decide whether Andrea or Miranda will be their role model for female power.

The voice of Miranda offers an alternative perspective on how to view women with power. Mass consumption (in the form of a popular movie) of this subordinate perspective on female power provides a positive role model for women. Sowards&Renegar (2004) found:

[p]opular culture icons have long influenced how young women and others involved in social consciousness become aware of social injustices and their own sense of oppression, yet most academic literature has failed to address the power and influence of popular culture in consciousness-raising....many young women are empowered by female role models and become aware of their own oppression and the possibilities for emancipation through the consumption of popular culture. More importantly, young female audiences take away messages of empowerment... (p. 544).

Movies like *The Devil Wears Prada* can empower women, especially young women. Wolf (1994) states, young women "need mentoring. They need role models. They need basic power skills. They need an old girls' network....they need overt permission to kill the Dragons of Niceness that make success and achievement seem truly 'not worth it'" (pp. 257-258). Miranda is such a role model. Movies like *The Devil Wears Prada* demonstrate to young women that there is more than one way to wield power as a female.

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