



## Objectification and Confinement of Female Sexuality in Austen's Emma and its Literary Adaptation: A Postfeminist Comparative Analysis

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### Abstract

This research explores the construction of female sexuality in the literary adaptation *Emma* (2020) directed by Autumn de Wilde through a postfeminist lens. The research is based on Iris Marion Young's theory of oppression examining the feminine body compartment and mobility. The movement and ability of females to perform household and outdoor chores is restricted by the male gender. The restriction on the sexuality of a woman develops a fragile and dependent self. The female characters of *Emma* (1815) reveal the oppressive structures that confine feminine activities under the definition of morality and grace. The categorization of female qualities develops a gendered discourse that encourages a binary classification of sex as male and female. The division between sex is further strengthened by the association of female sexuality with material objects. The material objects re-enforce and encourage objectification and confinement of female sexuality. The literary adaptation highlights the negative social implications of material objects on the portrayal of female characters.

**Keywords:** Female Sexuality, Postfeminist Thought, Mobility, Oppression, Material Objects

### 1. Introduction

The agenda of postfeminism is to focus on individual power and strength of women instead of categorizing them as victims. The postfeminists argue that second wave feminism enforced 19th century sexual morality, spiritual purity and political helplessness (Gamble 39). Women were left with an inappropriate martyred role of a victim that was prevalent hundred years ago. The postfeminists do not consider themselves as anti-feminist but rather provide a better version of feminism (40). According to postfeminists, gender is a social and cultural construct and not determined biologically whereas second wave feminists believed the opposite. Furthermore, postfeminists like Iris Marion Young and Miranda Fricker believe that women are not oppressed because they are biologically inferior and socially marginalized (41). Postfeminism replaces dualism with diversity and consensus with variety.

Jane Austen primarily focuses on the plot of marriage and the character development of the female heroines of her novels, presenting a symbolic resilience against patriarchal values. The novel *Emma* is a fictional work that focuses on Victorian society and is published in three volumes. Austen uses a satirical tone to critique the division of labor in the society based on gender and social status. The story opens with the details of Emma losing the governess of her house Miss Taylor who gets married to Mr. Weston. The novel deals with the themes of marriage, social status, gender roles and patriarchy. Moreover, characters are divided into classes for instance, superiors such as Emma, Knightley and Frank Churchill practice their roles in a way that is only profitable for their own self whereas inferior characters like Jane Fairfax, Miss Bates, Harriet and Robert continue to keep flattering the superiors. Emma enjoys the role of matchmaker while she also refuses to accept it as her planned-future.

The female characters in the novel view their body as a burden to be carried at the expense of their freedom. However, there are females Young believes who transcend beyond the definition of women provided by men (Young, "Throwing Like a Girl: A Phenomenology of Feminine Body Compartment Motility and Spatiality" 141). The representation of such female characters is also visible in the novels and literary adaptation of *Emma*. The confinement and objectification of women is visible in the most mundane tasks of body orientations such as walking, sitting and standing. For example, it is expected of a woman to sit with their legs closed and arms across the body. While walking, females tend to keep their hands close to their bodies which signifies a sense of protection from the outer world. Whereas, men mostly stand with their hands and legs apart. Young states that the following behavior is not universal of every woman, nevertheless, a vast majority of females project the same body movement.

The aim of the research is to shed light on the methods that oppress and sexualize women. The oppression of women is very subtle hence, people normalize them into their daily life. Through this, the patriarchal structure re-establishes its authority over the female consciousness. The thesis aims to expose prescriptive norms that redefine the sexuality of women in relation to patriarchal values. It also aims to gain the understanding of the body metaphors used by Austen. The understanding helps to gain insight into the postfeminist interpretation of the adapted films.

#### 1.1. Objectives

To explore female sexuality in the selected adaptations and the development of gendered discourse.

To highlight the social implications of material objects on the portrayal of female sexuality and character in the selected adaptations.

#### 1.2. Research Questions

How do the selected adaptation *Emma* redefine female sexuality and the development of gendered discourse?

How do the association of female sexuality with material objects undermine social implications of the character portrayal in Jane Austen's novel *Emma*?

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## 2. Literature Review

Austen's heroines are often considered to be of inferior status or somehow oppressed. When it comes to the position in society, Emma is not given the inferior position that other female character's hold. But rather Austen has used a technique to let the readers see the humiliation Emma goes through after every error that she causes (Smith 221). The readers would then feel her situation as a woman who belongs to a superior class but flawed. Her attractiveness remains secondary due to the position she is placed in material society throughout the novel. The material state creates binaries of inwards and outwards among both men and women. In this case, Emma is not left with enough choice for herself but one thing that she can manage to do in this society is to leave things as they are. For instance, her decision of not getting married ever in her life depicts the choice that she is left with. Emma's two different personalities, one her work for poor people and on the other hand her cold behavior towards Jane. The following nature makes her more like her father who is likely to be seen around women who do not hold a strong position in society. The people from the inferior class become an amusement for people of the upper class (224). Hence, through the character portrayal, the connection between class and gender is made more apparent in the novels.

The female body becomes the central focus of attention (Warhol 7). Hence, the body serves as a means of communication that provides women with some authority. However, their existence is defined by others. Warhol further states that women are also portrayed physically more vulnerable than men. They are more sensitive and tender (16). The women are not merely overlooked in the textual context but also are marginalized in the literary adaptations. The women play a passive role in the adaptation as their only direction is to appear on stage and contribute to the development of the narrative by being subordinate to the male gender.

Likewise, the film adaptations contribute further to the relevancy of the novels written by Austen (Francus 160). Austen uses the same pattern in all novels where the theme of courtship is prevalent therefore other major aspects are undermined. The scenes of courtship are shown on screen in modern times where masculinity is projected surreal; which misrepresent Austen's novels. One such scene of misrepresentation could be taken from the film version of *Clueless* where the ending of the movie is changed. Whereas, some adaptations are altering the roles as male genders could be seen loving children more than women. Many adaptations of Austen's novels have reversed the concept of male gaze as males themselves are seen as an object of desire. This reversal risks the position of women in film media. Moreover, in the postmodern world these adaptations act as a source of nostalgia of the Victorian period. Some argue that these versions of films are based on hyperreality and are beyond what Austen has produced in her novels (162). Therefore, the selected adaptations are often compared to their novels by critics while some believe that films should be seen through different parameters and not in comparison to source text.

The heroines of Austen's work face a constant struggle specifically when it comes to marriage (Myers 225). They face several challenges including marrying a man who is much older than them. The dichotomy of sexes label men as rational while women as irrational. The strains of the past are still prevalent in the modern world as males occupy the outer space whereas females are restricted to inner space. Somatic differences are often neglected because within male gender there might exist the feelings of the female gender and vice versa. Hence the somatic existence subsists according to each sex therefore women are not defected instead they are aware of their capabilities. For example, giving birth as well as nurturing a child. Austen's novels highlight these concerns of heroines regarding their future roles as mothers and wives. Yet other people are concerned about their fate. The heroines in Austen's novels try to maintain balance between their own needs as well as the social obligations (228). The obligations threaten their sole purpose to prioritize their own needs and concerns of the society. Emma feels the loss of her mother and the substitute mother as well as indulge herself into matchmaking (229). It helps her conceal the concerns about her own future's isolation. Whereas Anne deals with the feeling of homelessness and damaged happiness by losing a lover. In this way the feminine attributes are unfolded through the concept of womanhood.

### 2.1. Research Gap

The novel *Emma* has been constantly reread and interpreted in light of new theories and debates. Hence, a recent adaptation was produced based on the text called *Emma* (2020). The recent status shows that very little to no research has been conducted. The already conducted researches have focused on the thematic, visual and linguistic aspects of the previously adapted films. They have explored the variations and similarities of the film adaptations to their source text, for example thematic, visual and linguistic concerns. Among the previously conducted scholarly research, the most focused area of study was on the depiction of women in Austen's novels. One primary reason for this emphasis can be attributed to the emergence of the feminist movement and its development in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The research aims to explore the portrayal of the material objects in the novel and adaptation *Emma* to highlight the methods which contribute to the oppression of women.

## 3. Research Methodology

The thesis utilizes qualitative research methods for analyzing the development of plot, characters and dialogue in the selected adaptations. The approach adopted to examine the thematic data of the selected adaptations is content analysis. The thesis explores the relationship of the selected adaptations with their respective source text. The selected adaptations provide an insight into the thematic understanding of the novels that remain unexplored due to their recent status. The research focuses on the thematic concerns for instance, marriage, social class, gender and attempts to

identify the underlying meanings in the text. The content analysis particularly analyzes the oppression and marginalization of women in the selected adaptations. For this purpose, the analysis is further divided into three sections: firstly, the examination of the plot reveals the socio-political patriarchal structures that oppress women in the society. The sequence of the events, conflict between characters and climax present a comprehensive ground for studying the structural framework of the story. Secondly, the character analysis highlights the role of socialization in forming the ideals and beliefs of a person. The continuing development of identity and the consequences of the actions initiated by the characters directly determine the flow of the plot. Lastly, discourse analysis sheds light on the use of language and dialogue in the formation of a dominant space that benefits the male gender. The submissive, silent and passive attitude of the female characters present an ideal image of femininity in a male dominated society. Whereas, an active and authoritative voice challenges the authority of the male characters.

The phenomenon of adaptation by Linda Hutcheon is categorized into two stages; product and process (Hutcheon 15). The adaptation of a text “cannot remain entirely faithful to its original text” (Kinney 8), hence, the creative and interpretative role of the adaptation provides a new insight into the thematic structure of the adapted text. The interpretative space allows the maneuvering of minor shifts in the development of the adaptation, however, the “source’s fundamental beliefs” are to be maintained. The maintenance of the original ideals presented in the text provides credibility and authenticity to the adapted version. In order to better understand it, Hutcheon compares adaptation to language, arguing that “there is no such thing as a literal translation, there can be no literal adaptation” (Hutcheon 16). Therefore, adaptation as a product is a creative representation of the original text. Similarly, adaptation as a process “is an act of appropriating or salvaging” (20) meaning from the original text in order to present it in a new light. In the case of the selected adaptation, the genre of engagement is showing and the form in which it is projected is film and theater. The change in the form of the story from a text to a film reflects a transfer of “expression from one mode to another” (Kinney 8). The analysis of plot, characters and dialogue contributes to the understanding of the literary devices used in the selected adaptation.

Iris Marion uses the term “oppression” (Young 40) to define these injustices against women. She gives five faces of oppression such as exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism and violence. Young states that women are physically handicapped because of their feminine sexuality. The existence of a woman is determined by the norms and values of a patriarchal culture. Female sexuality is assigned a subordinate and repressive status in comparison to male gender. Young uses words like “confined”, “positioned” and “objectified” (Young, “Throwing Like a Girl: A Phenomenology of Feminine Body Comportment Motility and Spatiality” 152) to define female sexuality. The role of female characters in the novel and literary adaptation further stress upon the powerlessness of feminine body existence. Females are restricted to use their full body capacities in the open world whereas boys tend to care less about the surroundings and future repercussions. For instance, major activities regarding female sex are more sedentary. The division of activities normalizes the everyday oppression faced by women. In performing girly behavior, she develops a body timidity that enforces a fragile understanding of female sexuality. Hence, the idea that girls are more likely to get hurt than boys (153). Another factor that contributes to the development of a fragile self is the fact that a woman is both an object and the subject. Austen builds on the idea of a woman considered as an object whose sole purpose is to marry and reproduce (Kramp 152). The female characters in her novel and also in the literary adaptation are also constantly subjected to male gaze.

The conceptual framework proposed by Young, states five indicators that reveal the oppression of a group. These include, exploitation, violence, powerlessness, marginalization and cultural imperialism. According to Young, oppression means a “structural phenomena that immobilize or diminish a group” (Young 42). A group, hence, is a social body of people who have a shared sense of identity. The collective body influences and shapes the history, thoughts and feelings of the individual members. In relation to this perimeter, a social group of females can be constituted. The restriction on the feminine body comportment and mobility identifies a form of oppression that develops a fragile female self. The portrayal of female characters in the literary adaptation reveals the social implications of confinement and objectification on female identity.

#### 4. Data Analysis and Discussion

The restriction imposed on women is not merely physical but is also apparent through their choice of words. Language plays a role of communicator between characters and events of the plot. The language is used as a signifier and the significance is realized in the grand scheme of story. When the novel is converted to adaptation some elements of story such as characters, dialogue, themes and events become the sign system through which a story unfolds (Hutcheon 10). The freedom of mobility of a female character in the society is dependent on the socio-political status (Cresswell 177). The society protects privileged people but underprivileged people have to face constant oppression due to their social status in society. Emma’s early life is referred to as “best blessings of existence” (4) while her friend Harriet Smith has been labelled as “daughter of nobody” (74). Austen provides a description about the condition of life of two women of the same age but different social statuses. The social position gives one woman “the power of having rather too much” (4-5) whereas, the other is manipulated by the privileged group. Knightley referred to Emma as a “spoiled child” (121) and “nonsensical girl” (259) who has been protected by people around her for twenty-one years.

Beauvoir challenges the masculinist idea of motherhood as she states “first violated, the female is then alienated—she becomes, in part, another than herself” (Zerilli 117-118). Beauvoir argues that by being pregnant the woman shares her body with another being and the experiences feel foreign as the physical boundaries of the body are reshaped. The novel raises a question about “what was there for a father to do?” (66) because men can take care of children but the male dominant society associates these roles with the female gender and burdens them with responsibilities. Moreover, John Knightley and Charles Musgrove practice similar masculine behavior as they are free from the responsibility of taking care of the children.

The idea of inner and outer space act as symbolic codes in the selected novel. The fear of safety forces women to keep themselves and the children confined to the inner space so that they remain safe in the absence of the father. Young argues that the society convinces women that ‘outer space’ is an area restricted for male gender and women might hurt themselves in the outside world (*Throwing Like a Girl: A Phenomenology of Feminine Body Comportment Motility and Spatiality* 149). The incidents at Randalls depict that John shows authority over his wife through his masculine ability to stay unharmed by the severity of weather. Later, the tidings become a source of relief to Isabella’s motherly nature. Isabella is considered a delicate and fragile creature who needs to travel in the carriage or else she will hurt herself on the way back home. On the other hand, Emma’s affection towards Mr. Woodhouse reflects the typical father-daughter relationship but the relation often becomes the source of discomfort for Emma during outdoor engagements. Emma states “I am only afraid of your sitting up for me” (Austen, *Emma* 256) because her father’s anxious nature limits her chance to enjoy her days of youth.

Young states that the discourse of daily life divides people into various social groups such as male and female (Young 42). Emma’s narrative provides an insight to the patriarchal society where women see marriage as an opportunity to achieve independence in their lives. The marginalization limits the chance of women’s freedom; therefore, they form a connection with someone who possesses reasonable resources. Emma states that Miss Hawkin’s only reason to marry Mr. Elton is because she thought this to be “the best offer she was likely to have” (Austen, *Emma* 328) in her life. The male dominant society oppresses women by emphasizing upon the uncertainty of future hence, raising a fear for not having a better chance in their lives and instead rely on marriage to be well off. Fahad Faruqi states that society has a stereotypical notion regarding women that they need to be rescued by man and get married if they want to live a happy life (*Unmarried at 30: Handling the stigma with grace*). Emma believes that women like Mrs. Elton, Harriet and Weston accept the offer from a man who has reasonable resources. For instance, a house, a carriage and some pounds for living can help a woman climb a social status as Mrs. Elton states that her resources have made her “quite independent” (334). Society doesn’t allow a woman to be single and attempts to make the dream of independence impossible for her, therefore, women rely on male gender to be their savior.

In *Emma*, the plot revolves around prospective marriages between several major actors. Austen sheds light on the oppressive patriarchal structures behind the social institution of marriage. Marriage is a process of unification between two souls based on equality and justice. However, the females are often exploited and forced to remain dependent on the males. In the novel, marriage acts as a domestic burden on women’s shoulders who have to create a balance between their own happiness and the responsibilities the society imposes on them for being a woman. Despite marriage being a burden for women in the novel, Emma still does not want Mr. Woodhouse to class her with Isabella and Mrs. Weston. Emma believes that her relationship and circumstances of her wedding to Mr. Knightley are better than these women “whose marriages take them from Hartfield” (571). Location plays a significant role for the upper-class people of Hartfield in the novel, for instance, Emma considers herself privileged that she will not have to move from her place after the marriage. The novel *Emma* repeatedly stresses on women’s “domestic life” (581) whereas men’s social life is emphasized. Women could be seen busy in the domestic work such as knitting, nurturing the kids, household activities while men are occupied in business. Even though society oppresses women by taking their right to enjoy the liberty of outdoor activities and to explore the world.

The female mobility is further restricted by the cultural traditions and societal rules. The composition of norms and values favor the dominant group, while the marginalized members of the society are exploited. Young states that “oppression is structural” and makes people of marginalized group manipulate the members of their own group (Young 41). In the essay “Laugh of Medusa” by Helene Cixous, she stated that women have always been seen in an inevitable struggle against the conventional man in the society (Cixous 875). In the novel Harriet’s giggles are being criticized by the male of dominant group that shows women in Austen’s novel are deprived of their basic human rights. Cixous states that women should not live in fear of society quoting “Our glances, our smiles, are spent; laughs exude from all our mouths . . . . . We’re not afraid of lacking (878). Harriet’s laugh has been compromised in the name of societal norms that have undermined female gender throughout history. The patriarchs associate women’s laughter with negativity but if we look at Medusa, we can see that “she is beautiful and she’s laughing” (Cixous 885). Emma was oppressed by society when she learned the art of smiling instead of laughing and she further exploited Harriet by fixing her habit of giggling.

Society controls the movement of women instead of controlling the male gaze that follows them. Young claims that dominant group specifies a way of walking for women in society so that they do not tear their clothes or get dirty (*Throwing Like a Girl: A Phenomenology of Feminine Body Comportment Motility and Spatiality* 153). The restrictions on female gender limit them from the things they desire to do. Woman’s walking is associated with her

body compartments therefore, if the woman gets raped or harassed, it is signaled as an “encouragement” (Austen, Emma 162) by the molesters. In a male dominant society, the threat of sexual assault or violence remains constant in the lives of women. The fear of being a victim to such crimes has made certain areas unsafe for walking or any other kind of activity for them, especially at night. The popular belief, an alone woman is like an open treasure further supports the idea of exploitation and oppression. The blame is immediately shifted upon the female for being careless. Hence, several restrictions are placed on the mobility of a female.

Furthermore, the females are prevented from undertaking tasks that require force or physical exercise. Young argues, marginalized female groups are dictated to perform the role of soft and fragile women but these roles need to be performed within the same social class they belong to (Lived Body Vs Gender: Reflections on Social Structure and Subjectivity 413). Due to the constant surveillance of the dominant group of society, women’s intellect remains questionable while their beauty is exoticized. Mr. Elton and Mr. Knightley indulge in a competition with each other over the possession of Emma’s beauty. Knightley interrupts Miss Taylor in the discussion of females’ beauty and their intellect while saying “talk of her person than her mind” (Austen, Emma 46) because Emma’s beauty is prioritized over her intellect. The authoritative nature of the dominant group manipulates women belonging to the inferior social class of the society. The facial features become a source of determining women’s power and authority whereas, the society measures male independence by his wealth. When beauty becomes the symbol of authority for women then “it is always the lady’s right to decide the degree of acquaintance” (Austen, Emma 243) not men. Masculinity attracts the female gender, therefore, Emma criticized Frank who is easily “decomposed by hot morning” (444).

There exists a clear division of private and public space based on gender. Young states that female body compartments occupy indoor and closed space in order to feel safe (Throwing Like a Girl: A Phenomenology of Feminine Body Compartment Motility and Spatiality 149). Women are depicted in the inner space the way they move their bodies in the outside world. Young believes that space that belongs to women has a greater radius than the space they think they can occupy (149). Women are manipulated and they start questioning their own abilities that makes them believe the task is impossible for the female gender. Young girls are not given the opportunity to explore the capabilities of their bodies, therefore, they are threatened to perform outdoor activities that demand strength in outer space. Young argues that patriarchal society minimizes the chances of creativity for women whereas men have the liberty to express themselves freely (Throwing Like a Girl: A Phenomenology of Feminine Body Compartment Motility and Spatiality 141). Society and culture guide a female about feminine ways of walking through which she understands the limitations of her female gender. Women establish a difference between their own body compartments and the male body movement. Patriarchal society distinguishes the binary of male and female body movement therefore; women feel threatened to walk through the streets they are not familiar with while men walk freely.

#### **4.1. Material Objects and Body Politics in Jane Austen’s Emma**

Material objects can be defined as inanimate objects but the society associates cultural and religious values with them in order to favor the dominant group. Austen explores material objects that have multiple purposes in the selected novel and adaptation, Emma. The exploration of material objects is the criticism on male authority as well as the awareness for women in society. In the selected novel Emma, Austen showcases several material objects that society associates with female body in order to exercise power over the feminine subject.

#### **4.2. Readings Books and Marginalized Bodies**

Emma questions Harriet about Martin, “what has he to do with books”? (Austen, Emma 40). Book reading is a habit meant for upper class people especially women as it develops and nourishes human behavior (James 80). Emma believes that book reading defines the manners and social class of a person, for instance, Mr. Martin belongs to an inferior class of Abby Mill Farm, hence, he should focus on earning instead of reading books. The theory of Young reveals an oppressive intersection between social class and gender in the construction of a submissive female reader. Reading involves several social processes for instance, cultural norms, identity, race and sexuality that shape the understanding of the text in the consciousness of the reader. Austen’s female reader resonated with the lives of the female characters in the selected novels and the role of interpersonal relationships in undermining female body. The novels of Austen present the struggle of a female against the suppressive societal norms. Emma is confined to a preconceived notion of class that restricts her understanding of the outer world. For example, she holds a denigrative view of Martin due to his social status. The letter of Martin exposes the prejudice of the heroine against “the order of people” (Emma 00:13:46) who are considered not worthy enough of any “notice” (00:14:01). However, the reading of the letter identifies the gentile qualities of Martin who unlike Emma is not confined by the bookish world. The material object of books serves to highlight the importance of intuition and individuality in the development of human mind.

#### **4.3. Portrait and Power: Objectification of the female body**

In the patriarchal society, men get all the comforts despite being the symbol of toughness while females are associated with delicacy yet they face several challenges. Through the portrait of male gender, the female body and movement is restricted because it shows that the power and decision making in the domestic sphere is in the hands of the men. In the selected adaptation of Persuasion, Sir Walter’s portrait symbolizes male authority in the house. The living space has been utilized to portray wealthy patriarchs through these paintings as portraits of the males in the house represented continuity of male authority. The society honors the patriarch of the house by hanging their portrait on

the wall and in the case of no male patriarch, the female matriarch occupied the position. In this way, the portrait could be a symbol of both male and female authority. In the selected adaptation, the portrait of Sir Walter signifies the significances of the male figure in the household.

According to the theory of Young, equal representation of individuals is a key factor in promoting social equality and justice in a patriarchal society (Young 173). However, women and members of working class are denied access to the platforms that promote recognition and greater visibility in the social world. In Austen's selected novels, the material object, portrait plays a vital role in the oppression of female characters as it showcases women's outward beauty and worth in the eye of the dominant group. Women are represented as delicate and elegant subject in order to attract the opposite gender. Young states: "Women's oppression is structured by the interactive dynamics of desire" (Young 123). Women are categorically defined in terms of beauty and desirability. In the selected texts, females are continuously judged on the basis of their appearance. The experience of womanhood hence, is limited to the idea of a perfect female physique. The imprisonment of the women by her own body reveals the oppressive values associated with the culture of the dominant group.

Harriet's picture reflects that once Emma educates and instructs her; she will resemble the ideal subject portrayed in the picture. Emma intentionally adds her own "little improvement to the figure" (Austen, Emma 56) because she sees faults in Harriet's identity that need to be brushed up. Knightley criticizes the picture as he states that "you have made her too tall" (57), and more elegant than she is in reality. In the novel, Emma wants Harriet to be an ideal woman because in the subconsciousness of people, especially male gender, they have a stereotypical viewpoint that women are delicate. The portrait is subject to the judgement of male characters in the novel, for instance, Mr. Woodhouse Elton and Knightley have been given the authority for this purpose. Emma wants the male gaze to find attraction in Harriet, therefore, she has beautified her female body. Young argues: "Feminine existence appears to posit an existential enclosure... and the space beyond is not available to her movement" (Young 149-150). According to Young, women are more aware of the boundaries of the body than men. The body of the women; hence, becomes a burden meant to be protected and dragged along. The restrictions on the physical body are unconsciously ingrained in the mind of the women by means of socialization. The portrait acts as a reminder of power imbalance and female space in Emma.

#### **4.4. Carriage as symbol of Cultural Imperialism**

Carriage is associated with the male gender as they use carriage for outdoor purposes whereas women are restricted to private life hence, men find it unnecessary for women to own a carriage. Austen sees carriage as a symbol of independence and male authority. Miss Taylor having a "carriage of her own" (21) gives her the authority of an independent woman who remains free from the influence of the dominant group. However, women remain incomplete until they find a gentleman to marry and gain respect in the society hence, the agency still remains in the hands of male. In this manner, men become active members while females stay as passive members of the society. The material objects are used as tools by men to control women around them, for instance, Miss Bates often uses Mr. Knightley's carriage for her needs. Young believes that the oppression of women is partly the result of transference of power and authority to the male gender. She states: "Women's oppression consists not merely in an inequality of status, power, and wealth resulting from men's excluding them from privileged activities." (Young 50) Therefore, one factor is the transference of authority while, the other factor is the willingness of women to work for men. Young believes that the primary reason for gender exploitation is the transference of energies to men (50). For example, women provide sexual satisfaction, emotional care and other labor tasks without very little remuneration from men. On the contrary, men pay little attention to the emotional needs and feelings of women.

#### **4.5. Female Body and the Piano**

The object piano works as a tool to attract the opposite gender, for instance, in the recent adaptation, Emma starts playing piano as soon as she sees Mr. Knightley entering her house for the first time after Miss Taylor's wedding. Meling in her research states: "Placing female sexual desire in the piano – outside the body but within the domestic sphere... arouse and manipulate their male admirers" (Meling 13). In the selected novel Emma, Austen projects that female characters use the instrument as a means to compete with each other and gain the attention of the opposite gender, for instance, Emma tells Jane Fairfax to bring her own notes for playing piano. Emma believes that Jane might not be able to perform well without her notes, therefore, she shows authority towards Jane and tries to suppress her as she says "oh what a pity you did not bring your music" (Emma 00:50:08). In this way, Piano becomes a "desired female accomplishment" (Vorachek 28) in order to attract Knightley in the novel.

Playing the instrument piano signifies a sexist view that women portray their availability to the other gender by means of expressing their emotions through the musical instrument (Vorachek 27). It is considered that women have two primary functions, one is to reproduce and secondly that to relieve her husband's emotional stress (Haralambos and Holborn 463). Women used to play piano for their husbands in order to relieve the emotional stress that they got from the work environment. In the 18th and 19th century, the function of piano was to provide visual-sonoric simulacrum in a family and because of piano the harmony and order was maintained in the household (Vorachek 29). The performance of playing a piano act as a bridge to build up sexual tension between two genders without physical contact.

#### 4.6. Clothes and Control: Sexist Practice of Female Dress Styles

Attire is one of the material objects that describes whether the person belongs to a privileged group or an unprivileged social class. The self-confidence of women depends upon their outer self rather than inner self because if the woman is appreciated for her outfit, it contributes to her confidence and vice versa. Ellen Willis points out: "One of a woman's jobs in this society is to be an attractive sexual object, and clothes and makeup are tools of the trade" (Willis 41). In the novel *Emma*, the main concern of women is to look good in the public sphere because they only go out for social arrangements whereas men leave the house also for business purposes. In the Victorian period, the livery was made for the housemaids but not for other women, therefore, other women focused on clothing that attracted men. In some cultures, women are preferred to cover themselves to prevent the male gaze but in other cultures women are not restricted in the matter of clothing. Beauvoir argues: "Women's experience involves seen oneself seen through the eyes of another" (Yoshimi et al. 203). The female body is under constant surveillance and the male gaze becomes a tool to enforce patriarchal control over women. The female body movement is restricted in the public sphere of life by making women conscious of the lustful desire of the male gender. The male gaze creates a fear in the mind of the female further confining her to the private domain.

In the novel, Mrs. Elton wants validation of her dress from Jane Fairfax as she tells her that a man "took notice of my gown" (367). She repeatedly asks Jane Fairfax "how do you like my trimming"? (393) for the purpose of getting a compliment from her. This shows that Mrs. Elton is judging herself through outfit and "ornaments" (367) that complement her female body. Similarly in the adaptation, Mrs. Elton repeats "how do you like my gown?" (*Emma* 1:07:29). Likewise, through *Emma*'s character, Austen says that dress plays an important role in forming opinion in someone's eyes. Dress sense forms the first impression of a person before verbal communication takes place, for instance, *Emma* is intrigued by the opinion formed by Frank Churchill based on the "studied elegance" (Austen, *Emma* 389) of Mrs. Elton. Dress is a verbal form of communication that mirrors human mentality. Young describes the essence of feminine existence as a "set of structures and conditions that delimit the typical situation of being a woman... in which this situation is lived by the women themselves" (Young 140). Female experience is aligned with the concept of sexuality for example, female clothing works as a mechanism to repress female body mobility or a means to discipline a woman's body.

#### 4.7. Politics of Food

According to Young, the confinement of "women primarily to domestic work is indeed a source of oppression" (Young 145). Cooking food is a domestic activity that is done within the premises of a house by women and not men, therefore, dinner parties, tea parties and hosting picnics is considered to be a feminine activity. The selected novels show Austen's purpose to criticize the society for oppressing women by limiting their role. The consumption and production of food sheds light on the characters in the novel such as Mr. Woodhouse who is unnecessarily particular about his health and the food that he consumes. The social status is revealed by the character's choice of food because privileged people eat selected food items whereas people belonging to lower social class accept food of all types. The Indian female activist Vandana Shiva points out: "Food is being transformed from being a source of nutrition and sustenance into being a commodity" (Shiva 26). There is an inherent connection between socialization of human behavior and food, for instance, protocols of dining tables and etiquettes of food consumption as in patriarchal cultures, even today mean, men get a chance to eat first in households and social gatherings (Khan 41). Therefore, to challenge existing norms, food becomes a symbol of female agency as women try to liberate themselves by organizing a tea party in order to get away from the forced oppression and limitations on their identity.

### 5. Conclusion

Material objects identified in Austen's novel *Emma* and in its recent adaptation are physical items that are used by characters in everyday life. Therefore, material objects can be considered as plot devices that can reshape the physical reality as well as unconscious world of the characters. Several connotations are attached to these material objects that reflect the norms, values and teachings of the society. Patriarchal values can also be identified in the material objects that play a role in the oppression of women. The aim of Austen in *Emma* was to criticize the oppression women faced in their daily lives. Austen has provided awareness among the female readers about the ongoing oppressive nature of the dominant group by introducing strong female characters who challenge the conservative use of language. Language in the literary adaptation *Emma*, reinforces the traditional gender roles that restrict female mobility by labelling certain areas and activities unsafe for women. Due to this binary division, a clear power imbalance can be noted among both genders. The power imbalance allows the male gender to showcase their supremacy over the female gender. Women learn to practice submissive behavior during their interactions with the male while men undermine their feminine nature in dialogues. Austen shows that patriarchy limits the performance and participation of females in the public sphere by assigning them household chores such as knitting, painting, cleaning, gardening and learning musical instruments.

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