



A WOMAN'S OPPRESSION IN *THE DEVIL WEARS PRADA* MOVIE

Alifia Ghaida Wulandari¹, Tutik Ratna Ningtyas²
Universitas Pamulang^{1,2}

alifiaghaida48@gmail.com¹ dosen01217@unpam.ac.id²

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Abstract

This thesis examines the oppression and resistance of a woman in *The Devil Wears Prada* (2006) movie, using Virginia Woolf's feminist theory from *A Room of One's Own* (2021). This study focuses on two main issues: how oppression is depicted in the movie, and how the female main character resists the oppression. The method used in this study is qualitative, with the movie as the main source of data. The findings show that the main character, Andrea Sachs, experiences oppression through financial dependence and restrictions on her personal boundaries. Additionally, this study highlights her resistance, achieved through gaining financial independence and claiming her personal space. These acts of resistance reflect Woolf's idea that women need both money and personal space to be free. This study is expected to provide a better understanding of women's struggles in everyday life and contribute to literary studies on feminism, gender, identity, power, and equality.

Keywords: feminist, women's oppression, women's resistance

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, women are still expected to stay at home and depend on their partners for money. This expectation makes it hard for women to have financial freedom and personal space. To avoid this, many women work outside the home to earn their own money. However, in certain workplaces, such as the fashion industry, they face extra pressure to look attractive and be highly skilled just to gain respect. These expectations show that women still deal with oppression that limits their control over their own lives. Woolf (2021, p. 1) argues, "a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction." This means women need both financial independence and personal space to express themselves and achieve their dreams fully.

Furthermore, people often believe that women are not as strong or as intelligent as men, which makes it more difficult for women to be treated equally. In many workplaces, leadership positions are still mostly given to men, leaving women with fewer opportunities to grow in their careers. This unequal division of power keeps women from having influence and decision-making authority. Arahmah (2024, p. 2) explains that men often get top jobs, such as managers, which creates an imbalance of power. Woolf (2021, p. 10) supports this idea, saying, "women have always been poor; from the beginning of time." It highlights how women have been held back from opportunities for centuries. For centuries, women were denied education, the right to own property, and even the ability to make decisions about their own lives. This unfair treatment is called oppression. "Oppression is defined as injustice in which groups of people are systematically and unfairly restrained, burdened, or reduced by one or more causes" (Djohar et al, 2023, p. 180). For example, women are exploited because capitalism benefits by paying them less and using their labor cheaply while patriarchy forces them to do unpaid home work (Mohajan, 2022, p. 14). These systems work together to limit women's freedom, especially in careers and relationships. In relationships, women cannot make their own choices because they are expected to follow their partner's opinions.

For real change to happen, women must be free to earn money, make their own decisions, and grow as individuals. Women can contribute fully to society when they have equal access to education, training, and leadership roles. Issalillah, Khayru, & Wisnujati (2022, p. 36) emphasize that "...women must have full access to their development or even contribute...". This means women can only think, create, and succeed when their basic needs, such as

money and personal space, are met. Moreover, the 2006 movie *The Devil Wears Prada* is based on Lauren Weisberger's 2003 novel. It portrays the struggles of a young woman working in a fashion company where strict rules and high demands affect her personal life. Her relationship also impacts her career, showing how both workplace challenges and relationship expectations often shape women's lives. The movie highlights the negative effects of the fashion industry's oppressive environment and male dominance in relationships on the female main character. This study examines how *The Devil Wears Prada* shows a woman's oppression and how the main character resists and overcomes it.

Previous research on women's oppression has offered diverse perspectives across literature and film. Astuti and Kistanto (2021) analyzed Shenoy's novel *The Secret Wish List* using Simone de Beauvoir's existentialist feminism. Their study revealed how the main character suffers verbal abuse, loss of decision-making power, and forced gender roles in a male-dominated Indian culture, yet shows resistance by reclaiming her rights. Baroy et al. (2022) examined *Hidden Figures* through George Eliot's feminist theory, Friedrich Engels' conflict theory, and Lindsey German's patriarchy theory, showing how women face bullying, discrimination, and the undervaluing of intelligence within a male-dominated workplace. Yanti and Anggraini (2022), applying Marion Iris Young's oppression theory along with Alison Jaggar's radical feminism and Patricia Hill Collins' multicultural feminism, explored Jennifer Mathieu's *Moxie* and found oppression in the form of sexism, emotional abuse, and racial injustice, while resistance emerges through community building and rejecting patriarchal rules.

In contrast, this research applies Virginia Woolf's feminist theory to the movie *The Devil Wears Prada*, focusing specifically on financial independence and personal freedom. Unlike earlier studies that examined oppression in cultural, social, or educational contexts, this study highlights how Woolf's ideas uncover the importance of women's autonomy in managing their finances and personal lives, as well as their strength in resisting oppressive systems within the workplace and beyond.

METHOD

This study used a qualitative method to look at women's oppression in the movie *The Devil Wears Prada* (2006) by using Virginia Woolf's feminist theory. Grosseohme (2014, p. 109) explains that it is important to look at written materials like interview notes and focus group talks to learn about what people go through. This method helps us understand people's experiences and how they live in society. Fossey et al. (2002, p. 717) also say that qualitative research helps explore the meaning behind people's personal lives and the world around them. The research focused on the main character, Andrea Sachs. The writer chose important scenes and dialogues on purpose (purposive sampling) that showed oppression and resistance.

Furthermore, the writer was the main tool in this research, helped by the movie script and scenes to organize the data. According to Höller et al (2014, p. 141), "data sources refer to the broad variety of sources that may now be available to build enterprise solutions". It implies that data sources are different places that collect information, which they use to build systems and make informed decisions. The main data came from the movie, while books and journals were used as extra sources. To collect the data, the writer watched the movie many times, picked the scenes that showed oppression and resistance, and grouped them into categories. Then the data were studied using simple steps: reducing, showing, interpreting, and making conclusions, so the results could explain women's oppression and resistance clearly.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The Oppression in A Woman's Financial Conditions

In the movie, a man in a higher position than Andy, like the company's chairman, puts pressure on her to be thankful for her job and work hard as an assistant in a famous company. This shows how people in power can oppress a woman's financial freedom by making them feel like they must accept the pressure to keep their job. It highlights how women's independence is sometimes limited by those who expect them to stay quiet and follow orders.

Irv congratulated Andy, yet pressured her (Minute 21:34)



In this scene, Nigel introduces Andy to Irv Ravitz, the chairman of the fashion industry. Nigel says, “**This is Andy Sachs, Miranda’s new assistant**” (Frankel, 2006, 21:31–21:34). Irv replies, “**Oh, congratulations, young lady. A million girls would kill for that job**” (Frankel, 2006, 21:34–21:38). Even though his words sound nice, his body language says something else. He points his finger at Andy, which makes it seem like he’s putting pressure

on her to do well, no matter how she feels. Usually, this happens where women feel stuck in jobs they don’t like because the cost of saying no feels too high. Woolf (2021, p. 18) asserts that it’s hard to feel excited about doing work you don’t enjoy, especially when doing it to make others happy. It implies women feel trapped, like they have no choice. Sometimes, they feel they have to be extra nice or pretend to agree with others, even when they don’t want to. Andy wants to be a journalist, but she is taking this job to earn money and support herself; she doesn’t enjoy the job.

Besides, when Andy feels unhappy with her job, she talks to her coworker Nigel, hoping he can give her advice and help her find a way out of her problem. Even though she is upset, Andy feels stuck in her job because she needs the money to pay her rent, so quitting seems impossible. She feels trapped between her needs and her happiness. This makes her confused about what choice to make. Andy starts to wonder if staying in the job is worth the stress.

Nigel shows his ignorance towards Andy’s problem (Minute 32:34)



Note. From In this scene, Nigel’s uninterested response, “**So quit**” (Frankel, 2006, 32:28–32:30), surprises Andy. “**What?**” she asks (Frankel, 2006, 32:30–32:32). He repeats, “**Quit**” (Frankel, 2006, 32:32–32:34). Still perplexed, Andy asks, “**Qui...**” (Frankel, 2006, 32:32–32:34). Demonstrating his ignorance, Nigel then adds, “**I can get a girl to take your job in five minutes**” (Frankel, 2006, 32:34–32:36). In the fast-moving fashion world,

Nigel, who is the art director at *Runway Magazine*, could easily replace Andy at any time. This shows that her hard work is not truly valued. The influential people like Nigel often ignore how hard others work, making it even harder for Andy to succeed. Meanwhile, Nigel’s actions toward Andy show that she has few choices if she wants to keep her job. As the art director, he acts like Andy must follow his rules, or she could lose her position. Woolf (2021, p. 16) says, “He had the influence, the money, and the power,” which shows how men often have control over jobs and resources. Andy feels stuck in the company system that treats her as replaceable, showing she has little control over her life. She feels pressure to act in ways that are not true to herself, which makes her lose confidence in her own choices. Even when she works very hard, it never seems fully enough to gain respect or security in her job. This situation shows how the workplace can trap women in roles where they are easily replaced and not valued for who they are.

Moreover, a boyfriend is someone a woman often depends on. Nate can’t support Andy focusing on her job. He feels hurt because Andy seems to care more about her busy fashion job than their relationship. Even though fashion isn’t her dream, Andy starts to enjoy it. Andy works there to earn money and gain experience for her real career in the future. She believes every skill she learns now will be useful later. She wants to build a strong base before reaching her dream. Andy understands that success takes time and patience. She also knows that every step matters, even small ones. With this job, she is learning about hard work and discipline.

Nate is sick of Andy's transformation (Minute 1:17:16-1:17:20)

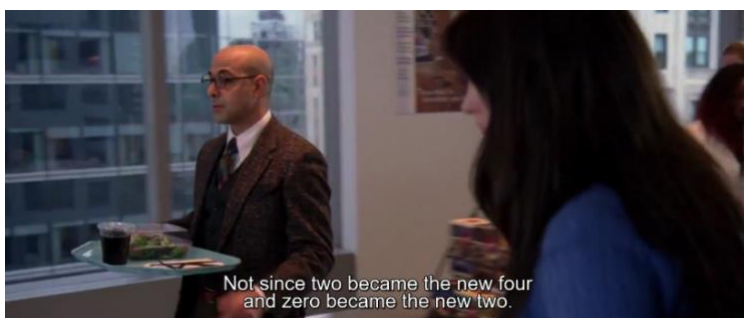


In this scene, Nate pressures Andy by saying it feels like Andy's superior is her real partner. He complains that she always answers her superior's calls and puts work before their relationship, which causes big fights between them. During an argument, Andy's superior calls, and she feels she has no choice but to answer. Nate then says, **"...the person whose calls you always take..."** (Frankel, 2006, 1:17:16–1:17:18) and adds, **"...that's the relationship you're in."** (Frankel, 2006, 1:17:18–1:17:20). His words show that he's jealous because it seems like Andy cares more about her job than him. Yet, Andy is not doing this because she loves the job; conversely, she needs the money to live. Andy and Nate argue because Nate doesn't understand how important her job is. This shows that it can be hard for women to earn money when their partners get in the way. Vice versa for men, making money is often easier and less stressful. Woolf (2021, p. 10) says, "to earn money was impossible for them." This means that even women in the past were not allowed to earn their own money, which is why they couldn't be fully free or independent. That kind of oppression still happens today.

The Oppression in A Woman's Personal Boundaries

The early example of a woman's oppression of personal boundaries at work happens to Andy. While eating in the office canteen, her co-worker Nigel comments on her food. He points out that she is eating too many carbs and says that most women in the *Runway* usually eat salads to stay thin. This shows that the fashion industry expects women to have a certain body shape to fit into stylish clothes, and that's why the other women at the company do not eat like Andy does. Meanwhile, Andy does not care much about following those strict beauty rules and eats the food she wants. By doing this, she shows that she values her own comfort and choices over the industry's unrealistic standards. However, her actions also make her stand out as different, which later leads to pressure to change herself in order to fit in.

Nigel tells Andy why the girls in the Runway do not eat much (Minute 20:13)



When Nigel notices that Andy has chosen the corn chowder, he remarks, **"Corn chowder. That's an interesting choice"** (Frankel, 2006, 19:58-20:01). He further comments, **"You do know that cellulite is one of the main ingredients in corn chowder?"** (Frankel, 2006, 20:01-20:06). Andy, who understands the implication and feels uncomfortable due to his remark, replies, **"None of the girls here eat anything?"**

(Frankel, 2006, 20:11-20:13). Immediately, Nigel sarcastically by saying, **"Not since two became the new four and zero became the new two"** (Frankel, 2006, 20:13-20:17). It shows how strict the fashion company is about body size. Nigel's comment is a clear example of how a woman's personal space is not respected, showing how she can be judged insanely. He tells Andy that if she wants to succeed in the fashion world, she has to change her appearance to match the company's idea of beauty. This shows how women are often judged more by their looks than their skills. Men often create the rules and expectations that women are forced to follow. This scene connects to Woolf (2021, p. 36) adds, "it is obvious that the values of women differ...from the values which have been made by the other sex". It implies that Nigel's comments about body size and cellulite show how strong the pressure is for women to meet these unrealistic beauty standards in the fashion world. Andy's experience shows how the workplace and male domination control women, limit their freedom, and make it harder for them to accept who they are.

Nevertheless, Andy spills food on her sweater during lunch, Nigel uses the moment to make fun of her. He speaks in a sarcastic way, telling her not to worry, as if she owns many sweaters like that. At that moment, Andy feels embarrassed and weak, realizing that Nigel's jokes are meant to make her feel unconfident. The laughter around her makes the situation even worse. Andy starts to doubt if she really belongs in that place. This moment shows how Nigel's words can hurt her self-esteem.

Nigel tells Andy not to worry about the corn chowder's stain (Minute 20:27)

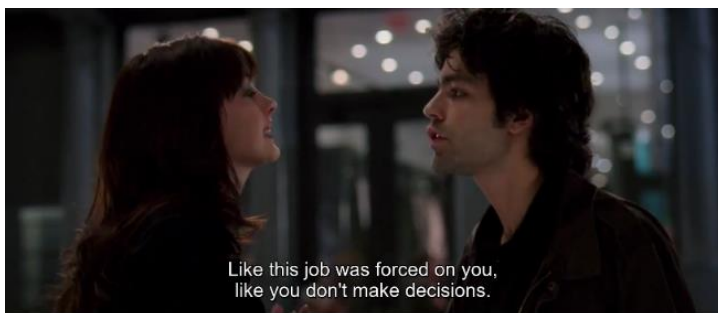


In this scene, Nigel shows a form of oppression by interfering with Andy's personal space. He makes fun of the way she dresses by saying, **"I'm sure you have plenty more poly blend where that came from"** (Frankel, 2006, 20:27-20:31). It portrays how the company's standard makes Andy humiliated by her male co-worker. This also shows how men always judge women's personal

choices, like what they wear. This scene connects to what Woolf said. Woolf (2021, p. 13) disputes, "why are women, judging from this catalogue, so much more interesting to men than men are to women?". This means that women are often seen mainly for how they look and how much men like them, instead of for who they are. In the fashion company, women are judged more for their appearance than their abilities. This kind of thinking makes women lose confidence in themselves.

Moreover, Nate doesn't like it when she becomes too focused on her work. He feels like Andy has changed and no longer gives him enough time or attention. He thinks she doesn't care about him as much as before. Meanwhile, Andy is just working very hard to do well in her career. Andy becomes focused on her work because she wants a better future.

Nate is frustrated with Andy's behavioral changes (Minute 1:15:51)



In this scene, Andy meets Nate at an exhibition. Nate found out that Andy was going to Paris which shows her dedication in her job yet, he gets angry and says, **"Like this job was forced on you, like you don't make decisions"** (Frankel, 2006, 1:15:51-1:15:54). This shows that Nate doubts Andy's ability to make her own choices. He thinks she is just going along with what others want, and he ignores the fact that Andy is working hard

and making her own path. Nate's reaction is a form of interrupting her personal space and independence, just like when a woman is interrupted while trying to speak. This scene reflects a bigger problem where women's choices are often questioned or controlled by people around them, making it harder for them to follow their dreams fully. Nate's behavior shows what it's like when a boyfriend doesn't truly support his partner. She kept getting interrupted (Woolf, 2021, p. 32). It's not just about words; it also means that women's opinions, choices, and independence are not respected. When a woman is interrupted, it shows that others don't fully listen to her or believe in her ability to decide for herself.

Financial Freedom

The first sign of Andy's commitment to financial independence is her decision to stay at her job for one year. Despite having other opportunities, she chooses to remain at the well-known company because she believes it will enhance her professional growth and provide valuable experience for her future career. This choice reflects her dedication to achieving long-term goals while gaining stability and skills.

Andy decided to keep doing the job for a year (Minute 25:33)



In this scene, Andy makes a big decision. Even though she feels like she doesn't belong in the fashion world and doesn't like the job, she chooses to stay for one year. She says, "**I just need to stick it out for a year. One year**" (Frankel, 2006, 25:33-25:36). This shows that Andy is starting to think the job might help her in the future. Even if it's hard and not what she truly wants, she stays because it could lead to better things later.

She follows the rules for now, not because she agrees, but it might help her reach her goals. This idea matches the true meaning of financial freedom, when a woman can choose her life and career based on her values, not because of money problems or pressure from society. Woolf (2021, p. 52) says that no one can know if what you want will last forever or only for a while. This reminds us that financial freedom allows women to live, work, and create on their terms, without being forced to follow others' expectations. It shows the primary goal of resistance, for women to have the power to make their financial choices.

Andy's change in appearance and behavior is intentional and meaningful. It is not just about fitting in but about survival and shaping her future. Her effort reflects her goal of gaining financial freedom.

Andy commits to changing herself (Minute 34:36)



In this scene, after many people underestimate Andy because she is expected to pursue journalism instead of fashion, she changes her appearance to secure a promotion and take on more serious work. She asks Nigel for help in choosing her outfit. This is why she says, "**Nigel? Nigel, Nigel.**" (Frankel, 2006, 34:36-34:40). It shows her smiley face indicates that she is prepared for a significant transformation that

will change her financial situation. She feels more confident about herself. She is ready for the transformation and has adjusted herself to reach promotion in her job. This is similar to what Woolf (2021, p. 18) says about how "no force in the world can take from me my five hundred pounds." It describes that Andy doesn't allow people to replace her or look down on her just because of how she dresses or because she doesn't know much about fashion at first. Instead of giving up, she changes her appearance to match what the company expects. She works hard to fit in, learns what is needed, and shows that she can do her job well. She wants to prove that she belongs and can succeed, even if it means trying new things. By doing this, she gains respect and slowly earns the trust of others. It shows that effort and persistence can help a person overcome challenges.

Meanwhile, Andy returned home late from the *Runway's* event despite being expected to celebrate Nate's birthday party. She was unable to arrive on time because attending the event was necessary for networking with individuals who could influence her career. Lacking the courage to refuse to meet these potential contacts ultimately resulted in her late arrival at Nate's party. Nate felt upset because he had been waiting for Andy to celebrate with him. He believed that her job at Runway was taking too much of her time and attention.

Andy explains herself (Minute 1:06:08)



In this scene, Andy explains why she was late by saying she had no real choice about how to attend the event. She defends her decision by pointing out how important the gathering was for her career. She says, “**I kept trying to leave, but there was a lot going on**” (Frankel, 2006, 1:06:04–1:06:08), and then adds, “**...and you know I didn’t have a choice**” (Frankel, 2006, 1:06:08–1:06:10). These dialogues show

that even though she planned to leave early to be at Nate’s birthday, she felt she had to stay because important people were there, people who could help her grow professionally and possibly get a better salary in the future. This scene connects to Woolf (2021, p. 52) argues, “... it is necessary for one side to beat another side...” This quote shows how important Andy to prioritize her job event over her boyfriend’s occasion, for her better future. It shows that for women to have real freedom with money or their jobs, they need to stand up to their partners if those partners try to hamper them. To have financial freedom, women need to earn their own money. They must fight through these challenges to reach success in their own way. They may face pressure from people who do not understand their choices. Sometimes this pressure comes from family, friends, or even their partner. Still, women must stay strong and believe in their goals. If they give up, they lose the chance to grow. By staying firm, they can build a future that truly belongs to them.

Personal Space

At the beginning of her journey, Andy pushes back against the expectations of those around her. Her friend enthusiastically claims that her job at a prestigious fashion magazine is something “a million girls would kill for.” Yet, Andy insists she’s not like everyone else and doesn’t view this position as her dream. This shows the beginning of Andy’s inner conflict between what society expects from her and what she truly wants.

Andy emphasizes that she is different (Minute 10:40)



In this scene, Andy is hanging out with her friends at a restaurant after just completing a job interview at *Runway*. One of Andy’s friends, Doug, is shocked by the news because it is the best fashion magazine company, and many girls would die to work there. However, Andy emphasizes that she is different from the girls at *Runway* who would kill to be in her position as the personal assistant. Doug says, “**A million**

girls would kill for that job” (Frankel, 2006, 10:38-10:40). Andy replies, “**Yeah, great. The thing is, I’m not one of them**” (Frankel, 2006, 10:38-10:43). It shows that Andy wouldn’t try too hard to be in that company, which means if she weren’t accepted, it would be fine for her because it’s not her passion. This scene shows that people should not let outside pressure control their thoughts. Woolf (2021, p. 37) says that even if we think freely, we might not be able to change how others think. Real freedom means thinking for yourself, not just following what society wants. Although Andy works at *Runway*, a top fashion magazine, she doesn’t let it define who she is. Andy doesn’t see it as her goal, unlike others who dream of that job. She also cannot change what her friend thought about her job, which “a million girls would kill for”. She wants to stay true to herself and not just follow what others think success should be.

Unfortunately, Nigel also oppresses her because of her appearance in a lousy sweater. Yet, Andy stands up to him by saying she won’t change just because she works in the fashion industry. Andy thinks that she is enough and she commits not to change herself. Andy shows that she values who she is on the inside more than what she wears. She knows that true worth is not measured by clothes or style. This moment proves her strength to resist outside pressure. Even though others try to control her, she chooses her own path. Andy believes that staying true to herself is more important than pleasing others. This gives her confidence to face challenges in her job. In the end, her choice shows real independence and self-respect.

Andy stresses her commitment to Nigel (Minute 20:39)



In this scene, Andy talks honestly to Nigel about her commitment. She knows he doesn't like her clothes and says, **“You think my clothes are hideous, I get it.”** (Frankel, 2006, 20:34–20:36). But then she explains what she believes in: **“But, you know, I'm not going to be in fashion forever...”** (Frankel, 2006, 20:36–20:39). She ends by saying, **“...so I don't see the point of changing myself just because I**

have this job.” (Frankel, 2006, 20:39–20:43). This shows that Andy doesn't think she should change who she is just to fit into the fashion world. Andy wants to stay true to herself even if others expect her to act differently. She shows that a job should not control her identity. Andy believes that her values and character matter more than fashion trends. She wants to focus on her goals and not lose herself in the process. This proves she has confidence in who she really is. This scene connects with Woolf (2021, p. 54), argues that being true to yourself is more important than pretending to be someone you're not. Andy's choice not to change how she looks just to fit into the fashion world sends a strong message about women's freedom of expression. By sticking to her beliefs, Andy shows that she is free to be herself. She sends the message that women don't have to change who they are to make others happy, they have to stand against the oppression.

Furthermore, Andy stands up to Nate for not supporting her and shows he doesn't respect her job. Nate makes fun of Andy's new look and her success in the fashion world. He forced her and claimed her job doesn't matter. This shows that he doesn't understand or value the hard work she puts into her career.

Andy speaks out about her frustration (Minute 1:16:02)



In this scene, Nate makes fun of her upcoming trip to Paris, saying she took a chance that should have gone to her co-worker, Emily. Yet Andy points out that he doesn't like her job in the fashion world. Nate doesn't see how much she's grown or changed when she says, **“And you think fashion is silly. You've made that clear”** (Frankel, 2006, 1:16:02–1:16:05). Nate tries to invade that space by mocking Andy's choices and making her feel guilty for her

success. But Andy's honest words push back, reclaiming her right to be proud of her achievements. Like the quote suggests, it becomes a powerful and meaningful moment when she tells the truth because it shows her growth and her refusal to let someone else define her worth. This situation fits the idea that “be truthful, one would say, and the result is bound to be amazingly interesting” (Woolf, 2021, p. 44). It reflects the moment when Andy finally speaks up about her frustration with Nate. In this scene, Andy stops hiding her real feelings and tells Nate the truth that he does not respect her job or understand how hard she has worked. By being honest, Andy resists the pressure to stay silent just to protect Nate's ego. Her truth-telling becomes a form of resistance because she refuses to shrink herself or act as if her career is less important.

CONCLUSION

To sum up, this thesis explains how *The Devil Wears Prada* (2006) movie portrays a woman's oppression and resistance through the character of Andy. She experiences restrictions in both her workplace and personal relationship, which limit her freedom financially and personally. By using Virginia Woolf's feminist theory (2021), this study highlights that women need financial independence and personal space to live freely and grow. Andy's story becomes an example of how women can resist oppression by making their own choices and pursuing independence. The advantage of this study is that it connects a popular cultural text with feminist theory, making abstract ideas from Virginia Woolf more concrete and relatable for modern audiences. It shows how feminist theory remains relevant when applied to contemporary media. However, the limitation is that the analysis focuses

only on one movie, which may not represent the wider range of women's experiences in other contexts. This study can be applied to further research in literature, film, and gender studies by using feminist theory to explore how media reflects women's struggles and resistance. It can also serve as a reminder for society to support women's rights, independence, and equality in both professional and personal life.

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