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University of Southern Denmark



Center for American Studies



From Triumph to Tragedy -

**The Impact of Gender and Race Politics in Popular Culture on the Lives of
Marilyn Monroe and Whitney Houston**

Master's Thesis by
Petra Ilic

Thesis Advisor:
Clara Juncker

University of Southern Denmark
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ABSTRACT

Lives and careers of Marilyn Monroe and Whitney Houston left an important cultural mark not only in the United States but also in the whole world. Their contribution to the film and music industry is undeniable, and their performances significantly changed the established norms and expectations in the entertainment industry. However, Monroe's and Houston's struggle throughout their lives and their early deaths point to personal dissatisfaction and blur the common conceptions regarding fame and stardom as the ultimate achievements of the American Dream. This thesis aims at analyzing the lives of Monroe and Houston from gender and racial perspective, in order to show that gender and racial inequality in a society and its representation in popular culture contributed to the fast deterioration of the two stars.

Hence, this thesis states that the star image and popularity of Marilyn Monroe and Whitney Houston originate in a hegemonic system, popular culture and the media. Gender and race ideologies that prevail in a hegemonic society not only have a significant impact on the construction of public identity but also influence the stars' private lives. As a result, the pressures of the entertainment industry, including production companies, the media and the public, contributed to Monroe's and Houston's turbulent downfall. The inability to maintain the perfectly constructed public image, resulted in Monroe's and Houston's drug addiction, personal dissatisfaction, and public ridicule, which finally led to their premature deaths.

The thesis is divided into four chapters, each covering lives and careers of Monroe and Houston from different perspectives including gender, race, stardom, sociology of bodies, and hegemony and popular culture. The first chapter begins with the historical overview of the 1950s and the 1980s and focuses on the prevalent notions regarding gender and race politics in the US during the two decades. This research shows that both during the 1950s and the 1980s the prevailing ideologies regarding race and gender focused mainly on male superiority, in an attempt

to protect the notions of masculinity which was believed to be under threat of the rising feminist movements and multiculturalism. Moreover, the thesis discusses the concept of stardom and the requirements for creating the perfect star image taking into consideration gender and racial differences. Thus, Marilyn Monroe's rise to stardom is analyzed as an outcome of hegemonic structures in society, strongly impacted by the notions of masculinity. Her star image has been created in order to conform to the prevalent ideologies of the 1950s in which Monroe was presented as a woman who appeals to men, but never threatens the established order and thus always remains in the subordinate position. In the same manner, but with regard to the 1980s gender and race politics, the analysis of Whitney Houston shows that the media conglomerates and music companies carefully constructed her star image. Houston's lady-like public persona and her cross over to pop music, which during the 1980s was regarded as white music, suggest that her rise to stardom was an outcome of the calculated moves by her employer Arista Records, led by the music patriarch Clive Davis.

Furthermore, the second chapter of the thesis focuses on the issues of race and analyzes Marilyn Monroe and Whitney Houston through the concepts of whiteness. Thus, the chapter focuses on the main characteristics required by whiteness and researches to what extent Monroe and Houston achieve the white ideal. The section shows that both stars came close to fulfilling the ideal by being Christians, privileged members of a society and representatives of the American nation. However, both Monroe and Houston were predestined to fail, since women, solely for their biology, are traditionally believed to be marked and thus unable ever to become entirely white. Moreover, the thesis approaches the subject of race by analyzing Monroe and Houston through the lenses of blackness in order to confirm their inability to reach the whiteness ideal. Hence, Monroe's emphasized sexuality, her conversion to Judaism and both Monroe's and Houston's drug addiction stain their whiteness and distance them from becoming members of the pure race. The notion of

whiteness shows to be a creation predominately constructed to secure white male dominance and by that control the subordinate groups of society.

The third chapter of the thesis researches sociological aspects of the body and analyzes how the body realizes itself by accomplishing tasks established by a social system. As a result, Monroe and Houston are analyzed through three established body types – the disciplined body, the mirroring body, and the communicative body – with an aim to show the discrepancies in their behavior and their personality loss. The thesis, furthermore, connects the body theory with the pop cultural theory and its approach to celebrity bodies. The research shows not only the body's involvement in the construction of hegemonic ideologies regarding masculinity and femininity but also the body's conversion into an object to be consumed by the public. Hence, the stars, whose bodies are continuously exploited, frequently become personally and emotionally dissatisfied and lose their authentic selves, which leads to drug consumption, public outbursts and, in the case of Monroe and Houston, to the premature death.

The fourth and final chapter of this thesis discusses the interconnectedness of hegemony and popular culture, showing that popular culture serves as a platform for spreading the prevailing ideologies to the masses. In this regard, the thesis examines race and gender representation in popular culture and analyzes Marilyn Monroe and Whitney Houston as the representatives of subordinate groups in a society. As members of the oppressed groups, Monroe and Houston show resistance to the dominant social system and seek to include women and African Americans in the media and entertainment industry.

Monroe and Houston symbolize the tragic heroines of the twentieth century, who helped in paving the way for the inclusion of women and people of color in popular culture. The two stars exemplify the struggles of the subordinate groups of society and serve as an inspiration and a reminder for the generations to come that the approach of popular culture needs to be changed. Both

Marilyn Monroe and Whitney Houston suffered from the hegemonic system in which dominant groups construct the ideologies and dictate the norms and rules in society. Monroe's and Houston's resistance to the system proved to be too much to take and the two stars tragically ended their lives at the age of thirty-six and forty-eight, respectively. Nevertheless, their contribution to the changes of prevalent ideologies regarding race and gender stand as their legacies to this world and ensure that these two icons are never forgotten.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>INTRODUCTION</i>	1
<i>CHAPTER I – CREATING THE SUPERSTAR</i>	6
<i>LIFE IN THE 1950s</i>	6
<i>RISE TO STARDOM</i>	10
<i>BECOMING MARILYN MONROE</i>	13
<i>LIFE IN THE 1980s</i>	19
<i>“IT IS TIME TO BE WHITNEY HOUSTON”</i>	21
<i>CHAPTER II – BLACK MARILYN/ WHITE WHITNEY</i>	27
<i>THE ISSUE OF WHITENESS</i>	27
<i>IS MARILYN MONROE WHITE?</i>	32
<i>IS WHITNEY HOUSTON BLACK?</i>	38
<i>CHAPTER III – CAN I BE ME?</i>	48
<i>ARTHUR W. FRANK’S BODY THEORY</i>	48
<i>THE DISCIPLINED BODY</i>	50
<i>THE MIRRORING BODY</i>	58
<i>THE COMMUNICATIVE BODY</i>	64
<i>CELEBRITY BODIES AND POP CULTURE</i>	70
<i>CHAPTER IV – DISRUPTING HEGEMONY</i>	73
<i>HEGEMONY AND POP CULTURE</i>	73
<i>HEGEMONY AND GENDER</i>	75
<i>HEGEMONY AND RACE</i>	79
<i>CONCLUSION</i>	86
<i>BIBLIOGRAPHY</i>	90

INTRODUCTION

On February 11, 2012, in Beverly Hills, American pop icon Whitney Houston was found dead in her hotel room. Exactly fifty years earlier, on August 5, 1962, Hollywood's biggest star, Marilyn Monroe, was found dead at her home in Brentwood, Los Angeles. Both Houston and Monroe died from a lethal combination of drugs – the vice they were both publicly known to have struggled with. Both deaths were identified as accidental. Here, however, every other connection between the two stars seems to disappear. Nevertheless, a more in-depth analysis of the lives of these two divas reveals striking resemblances – starting from their early beginnings in the entertainment business, their transformation into America's superstars, their peak popularity and personal struggles, to their death. Both Monroe and Houston lived in crucial times in American history during which pop culture became a tool for spreading the prevailing ideologies to the masses. The 1950s and the late 1980s and 1990s represent the decades in which the issues of gender and racial equality were raised and sought to be resolved. Thus, both Monroe's and Houston's lives exemplify dominant beliefs regarding race, gender, class, and sexuality, as well as the effect a consumerist society has on a superstar. Moreover, both stars symbolize the 'from-triumph-to-tragedy' story, where they seemingly had it all but gave it all away, ending lonely and dying too early.

Monroe and Houston left a valuable mark on the 20th century. Their influence on society touches upon numerous social aspects such as hegemony, gender, race and pop culture. Accordingly, in this thesis, I choose to analyze the lives of Marilyn Monroe and Whitney Houston from different angles, including cultural, historical, literary, sociological, audio, visual and textual analysis. This thesis begins with a chapter that offers a brief historical overview of the 1950s, which will give a better understanding of the prevalent ideologies of the time in which Marilyn Monroe gained popularity. The importance of the Cold War politics, hegemony, the notion of threatened

masculinity due to the rise of the feminist movements and change on the cultural scene are some of the aspects both the 1950s and 1980s were faced with. Hence, the materials used for the historical discussion are taken from cultural studies and include Martin Halliwell's *American Culture in the 1950s* (2007) and Graham Thompson's *American Culture in the 1980s* (2007). Besides, the thesis includes gender studies so as to locate the position of women in society. Judith Butler offers the analysis of gender theory in her book *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1999).

Furthermore, the thesis turns to social studies and, more specifically, to film studies and uses Richard Dyer's book *Stars* (1998) intending to focus on the influence that culture, politics, media and society have on the creation of stars. In his analysis of star creation, Dyer also includes notions of hegemony and consumerism, as well as the structure of the entertainment industry. The thesis uses Dyer's theory and applies it to Marilyn Monroe, analyzing the creation of her star image, concerning her background and the dominant beliefs and expectations during the 1950s in terms of gender and race. In the same manner, the thesis analyzes Whitney Houston's rise to stardom and takes into consideration the prevailing political, social, and cultural currents in the 1980s. Additionally, the thesis uses literary analysis and close readings of biographies and autobiographies of Monroe and Houston, including Monroe's *My Story* (2007), Gloria Steinem's *Marilyn: Norma Jeane* (1988), Cissy Houston's *Remembering Whitney: My Story of Love, Loss, and the Night the Music Stopped* (2013) and Narada Michael Walden's *Whitney Houston: The Voice, The Music, The Inspiration* (2013).

The issue of racial inequality is addressed in this thesis through the analysis of Richard Dyer's book *White* (1997), where Dyer provides a theoretical foundation for the emergence of whiteness and its effect on society. Dyer's theory places the representation of whiteness within the notions of Christianity, 'race' and colonialism and uses various case studies through which he

shows the construction of whiteness in movies and photographs. Hence, Marilyn Monroe and Whitney Houston are analyzed in this thesis through three criteria – Christianity, ‘race’ and colonialism – to show to what extent they fulfill the requirements of the white race, how privileged in American society they are, and to what extent they fall from the white ideal. Monroe’s whiteness has been one of the trademarks of her star image; however, this thesis also points to Monroe’s position of blackness. In contrast, Houston is analyzed through the lenses of whiteness, showing the complexity of her persona that, with the help of the media and pop culture, came to represent mixed-race of American society.

Next, the thesis moves on from cultural and racial studies and goes on to sociological studies, analyzing the significance of Monroe’s and Houston’s body. With Arthur W. Frank’s “For a Sociology of the Body: An Analytical Review,” in Mike Featherstone’s *The Body: Social Process and Cultural Theory* (1991) as a point of reference, this thesis demonstrates how a body realizes itself by fulfilling tasks that have been imposed by a social system. Frank’s theory suggests the emergence of four body types – the disciplined body, the communicative body, the dominating body, and the mirroring body. Each of the body types fulfills tasks within four dimensions – control, desire, relation to others and self-relatedness – however, each body fulfills the tasks differently. Hence, the primary focus of this chapter is the analysis of Marilyn Monroe and Whitney Houston through three body types: disciplined, mirroring, and communicative. The dominating body is excluded since it is an exclusively male body type. The analysis of the body types is supported by audio, visual and textual data, which allow a better discussion of how each body type fulfills different tasks.

By using visual and textual data, as well as literature, the thesis shows the discrepancy in the behavior of the two stars, in terms of their personal and professional struggles and personality loss. The analysis of Su Holmes’ and Sean Redmond’s *Framing Celebrity: New Directions in Celebrity*

Culture (2006) shows the interconnectedness of pop culture, consumerism and celebrity bodies and points to the expectations of the public and the media that the celebrities have to meet. The analysis of celebrity bodies supports Frank's body theory and helps readers understand the struggles stars face and the outcomes of their popularity. Hence, the bodies of Marilyn Monroe and Whitney Houston are used to show the effect that popular culture has on a celebrity.

Additionally, the thesis combines cultural, racial and gender theory in order to show the correlation between the three. The thesis analyzes Whitney Houston and Marilyn Monroe as members of a subordinate group in a hegemonic society. Accordingly, the thesis explains the importance of hegemony theory in popular culture by drawing on John Storey's *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture* (2012). The book discusses the notions of 'resistance' and 'incorporation,' which Storey explains as 'compromise equilibrium,' an idea that hegemony is based on negotiations between the dominant and subordinate groups of a society. Since popular culture is used as a platform where the prevailing ideologies are advertised and offered to the masses, the thesis goes on to discuss the connection between hegemony and gender, and hegemony and race in popular culture. Thus, besides being a powerful tool for spreading hegemonic ideology, popular culture turns out to be an important platform for oppositional groups. Supported by Richard Butsch's essay "Reconsidering Resistance and Incorporation," his contribution to Gail Dines' *Gender, Race, and Class in Media: A Critical Reader* (2018), Storey explains that hegemony theory provides the understanding of popular culture as a negotiated mix in which the resistance of the subordinate groups emerges and is mediated by being incorporated to the dominant culture.

As a result, the last part of this thesis analyzes Marilyn Monroe and Whitney Houston as representatives of subordinate groups in a hegemonic system. The examples used to analyze Monroe and Houston show their resistance towards the prevailing ideologies of their eras regarding gender and race, respectively. Visual, audio and textual data are included in the analysis so as to

support the argument that Monroe and Houston were members of subordinate groups. By reconsidering Monroe's and Houston's position in society, this part of the thesis suggests that the two stars resisted prevailing notions regarding gender and race and helped in the inclusion of women and African Americans into American culture and society.

Thus this thesis states that the star image and popularity of Marilyn Monroe and Whitney Houston originate in a hegemonic system, popular culture and the media. The prevalent ideologies of hegemonic society regarding gender and race played an important role in shaping the public identity of the two stars and greatly influenced their private lives. Accordingly, the pressures of the entertainment industry to maintain the perfectly constructed public image contributed to Monroe's and Houston's turbulent downfall, resulting in drug addiction, personal dissatisfaction and public ridicule, which finally led to their premature deaths.

CHAPTER I – CREATING THE SUPERSTAR

LIFE IN THE 1950s

The rise of a modern capitalistic society in post-World War II America carried with itself a need for upgrading, improving and adjusting brands and products in order to fit the global arena. At the same time, the beginning of the Cold War and the fear of communists in the early 1950s called for the reaffirmation of national identity. As Martin Halliwell, the author of *American Culture in the 1950s* (2007), explains, “[c]ulture in the widest sense fed into some of most potent myths about American collective identity.”¹ Thus culture presented one of the most important tools in warding off the communist threat and reestablishing national character. As a result, the 1950s witnessed the emergence of ‘mass culture,’ which not only helped in securing the social order and educating people, but also “suggest[ed] that ‘consumption’ had replaced ‘activity’ as the dominant mode of cultural behavior.”² According to Halliwell, “mass culture is the product of the ‘entertainment business,’ which grew dramatically with the development of television, popular music, and paperback book industries.”³ Hence, the increasing needs of the consumer society led to increased capitalist exploitation, which became noticeable in the 1950s entertainment business and in the new trend of creating superstars.

The film industry in particular faced numerous challenges, among others the decreased number of cinema-goers and the rising popularity of television, which required changes in the movie-making process. Hence, another change that took place in the 1950s was, as Halliwell identifies, “the broader shift from ‘Old Hollywood’ to ‘New Hollywood’ and the growth of media corporations.”⁴ The outcome was that Twentieth Century-Fox, Universal and Paramount controlled

¹ Martin Halliwell, *American Culture in the 1950s* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press, 2012), 12.

² *Ibid.*, 13.

³ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 169.

most of the 1950s studio products and also “ploughed money into rigorous promotional campaigns, ... and the growth of fan clubs to increase the visibility of their major star images.”⁵ With regard to the media control in the US by the corporations, the term ‘hegemony’ can be applied to explain methods for becoming and remaining powerful within the entertainment business arena.

As American social scientist James Lull explains, “[h]egemony is the power of dominance that one social group holds over others.... Hegemony is ‘dominance and subordination in the field of relations structured by power.’”⁶ Furthermore, Lull adds that “mass media are tools that ruling elites use to “perpetuate their power, wealth, and status [by popularizing] their own philosophy, culture and morality.”⁷ Thus the owners of the mass media industries are given the power to produce the content and the ideas which they prefer and to advertise them as the cultural mode of the period.⁸ Lull describes this ideological influence as “the essence of hegemony,” adding that its effectiveness “depends on subordinated peoples accepting the dominant ideology as ‘normal reality or common sense....’”⁹ Some of the elements of this hegemonic culture are “iconic brands of the American cultural landscape” as well as “Hollywood and the multimedia conglomerates.”¹⁰ Although Lull mainly talks about the class-based structures in American society, the idea of hegemony could be spread to the concept of gender roles, which were also influenced and exploited by the media and Hollywood.

⁵ Ibid., 170.

⁶ James Lull, “Hegemony,” in *Gender, Race, and Class in Media: A Critical Reader*, eds. Gail Dines, Jean McMahon Humez, Bill Yousman, and Lori Bindig (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2018), 39.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid., 34.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Graham Thompson, *American Culture in the 1980s* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 154.

According to Halliwell, the 1950s was a decade that epitomized the “standardized version of gender” both in real life and in movies.¹¹ On the one hand, the concept of masculinity was challenged by domesticity, which was believed to have made the returning soldiers “too soft, too complacent and too home-oriented to meet the challenge of dynamic nations....”¹² As a result, Hollywood studios started producing movies which were linked to remasculinization, such as westerns. On the other hand, American women were standardized not only in terms of domesticity, but also in terms of “class, region and ethnicity; advertisers focused almost exclusively on the white middle-class ideal: the housewife in the suburban Northeast and the ‘golden-haired girl of plantation mythology’ in the South.”¹³ Moreover, issues of sexuality became more noticeable, parallel with the rise of Hollywood blondes – Marilyn Monroe among others – and women were increasingly presented as both the devoted housewives and glamorous divas in the media. This sexuality, however, proved to be very dangerous for masculinity and needed to be controlled and contained in everyday life as well as on screen.

As the danger of weakening masculinity called for the reestablishment of gender roles and redefining the ideologies surrounding the subject matter, Sigmund Freud’s *Psychoanalysis* became a popular theory used to define masculinity and establish male superiority in American society. Mass media in general, and movies in particular, became a useful tool for portraying gender division during the 1950s. They have become not only useful means for analyzing women’s oppression and struggle faced under the powerful corporations, but also useful means for understanding the construction of a female star image.

In her book *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1999), Judith Butler states that gender is a cultural construct – that is, it was created by the existing culture in order to

¹¹ Halliwell, 40.

¹² *Ibid.*, 40-41.

¹³ *Ibid.*

maintain the distinction between the male and female in a patriarchal society.¹⁴ Accordingly, feminist film theorist Laura Mulvey explains that the popular culture belief during the 1950s was that woman stood as a “signifier for the male other, bound by a symbolic order in which man can live out his phantasies and obsessions....”¹⁵ This idea goes back to Freud’s *Psychoanalysis*, in which he presents women as the ones lacking the phallus and are thus “precisely what men are not and, in their very lack, establish the essential function of men.”¹⁶ Therefore, woman will never be able to transcend her lack and will always remain subordinate due to her inability to grow the phallus and become a complete person. It is because of this weakness that a woman is used to symbolize the power of the male. Furthermore, the mind/body duality, as Butler suggests, strongly influences the subordination of women since “the cultural associations of mind with masculinity and body with femininity” support “relation of political and psychic subordination and hierarchy.”¹⁷ This notion confirms the gender asymmetry, putting woman in the position of the subordinate. Both the construction of star image and gender portrayal in the movies support the popular beliefs concerning gender distinction during the 1950s as well as in the decades to follow.

This chapter will mainly focus on the issues of hegemony and the dominance and control the media institutions held over women, both during the 1950s and the 1980s, using the examples of Marilyn Monroe and Whitney Houston. I will introduce the argument that their rise to stardom was strongly influenced and controlled by powerful corporations, which later on contributed to their loss of personality, inner and outer struggles and early deaths. The chapter will deal with the main concepts and characteristics a person needs to possess in order to achieve stardom, as defined by

¹⁴ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1999), 9-10.

¹⁵ Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” in *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, eds. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (New York: Oxford UP, 1992), 834.

¹⁶ Butler, 58.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 17.

Richard Dyer. In addition, the prevailing beliefs in two periods, namely the 1950s and the 1980s, concerning gender, race and class will be incorporated in order to show the division and oppression in American society and link them to the experiences of Marilyn Monroe and Whitney Houston.

RISE TO STARDOM

The end of the World War II and the beginning of the Cold War in the United States marked a shift in culture and the establishment of the mass culture. As Martin Halliwell states, mass culture was largely a product of the entertainment business and was used as a tool to establish the popular ideologies and maintain power over people.¹⁸ Accordingly, the cultural scene witnessed the production of America's superstars, such as Elvis Presley and Marilyn Monroe, who become the symbols of post-war America and have been the objects of consumption to this day. Although stardom in the 1950s was presented through the lenses of the American Dream, Halliwell argues that "the movie industry was particularly keen to exploit this in the studio 'dream factories.'"¹⁹ The American Dream and its availability to everybody has proved to be just a cover-up for the exploitation of the stars by the studios in order to make profit and maintain their supremacy in the industry.²⁰ Hence, the studios' process of creating the stars is much more complex, carefully operated and controlled, so as to satisfy the dominant ideology of the time, while at the same time meeting the expectations of the consumer society.

The creation of superstars closely coincides with the concept of consumerism. As Richard Dyer explains in *Stars* (1998), "[t]he star has tangible features which can be advertised and marketed – a face, a body, a pair of legs, a voice, a certain kind of personality, real or synthetic."²¹ Hence, the notion of stardom itself carries the idea that there needs to be someone who is going to

¹⁸ Halliwell, 14.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 12.

²⁰ Richard Dyer, *Stars* (London: British Film Inst., 1998), 197.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 11.

decide and control the choosing of who may become the star. Since, in the 1950s, the production studios were in control of all the studio products, their directors were in charge of setting the standards to which the candidates needed to oblige and to fulfil in order to get a chance of achieving the American Dream. As Dyer points out, “both stardom and particular stars are seen as owing their existence solely to the machinery of their production.”²² Similarly, Suzanne Leonard and Diane Negra point out in “Stardom and Celebrity” that, during the 1950s studios were “well-oiled machines where star images were manufactured through authorized biographies and staged publicity events.”²³ In other words, were it not for the ruling elite, which runs the machinery, there would be no stars such as Presley, Monroe or Houston. However, one of the questions this chapter will deal with is: What are the characteristics that a person needs to fulfil to achieve stardom and are these characteristics universal?

In order for someone to become a star, he or she has first to meet the physical expectations of the media corporations. Dyer points out that “[o]ne function a star serves is to fix a type of beauty, to help a physical type identify itself.”²⁴ Therefore, the stars are used to set the standards of attractiveness in a certain period of time. Moreover, he goes on to explain that “[s]tars do not have a ‘strong character, but a definable, publicizable [*sic*] personality: a figure which can become a nationally-advertised trademark.”²⁵ Thus, apparently, the stars are used for certain characteristics they possess that the producers, directors and agents see as a chance for publicizing and prospering. Furthermore, the potential stars need to have ‘charisma,’ which represents “a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he [*sic*] is set apart from ordinary men and treated as

²² *Ibid.*, 13.

²³ Suzanne Leonard and Diane Negra. “Stardom and Celebrity,” in *The Craft of Criticism*, edited by Mary Celeste Kearney and Michael Kackman (New York: Routledge, 2018), 220.

²⁴ Dyer, 14.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 13.

endowed with supernatural.”²⁶ When a person fulfils these requirements, those in charge start creating the star image using the mass media, such as radio, television, and magazines. This process is comparable to the promotion of a new brand or product, with a purpose to be consumed and bring the company economic prosperity. Nonetheless, while physical appearance and charisma were openly recognized aspects in the construction of a star image, the corporations covertly considered aspects such as race and gender in the election of the future star.

In order to more closely understand the star system, one also has to be aware of the prevalent ideologies, which were controlled by the powerful institutions, and accordingly treated different social groups unequally. Although the star system has been construed in such a way that everyone has the opportunity to achieve the stardom, regardless of class, race or gender, Dyer points out that “[t]his ‘rags to riches’ image is very important, for it obscures the conditions of exploitation in the star system, while at the same time promising optimistic possibility for success which reproduces that system.”²⁷ This leads to the conclusion that class, race and gender still play a role in the criteria used for the election of the stars. Subsequently, Dyer states that “if you are not white, middle class, heterosexual and male you are not going to fit the cultural world too well – women only fit uneasily, whilst blacks ... hardly fit at all.”²⁸ Hence, in order to fit into the culture, mostly constructed to suit white men, a woman, and even more so a woman of color, has to adjust and conform to the cultural constructs and ideologies of her superiors. The entertainment business has proven to be a vivid example of women’s oppression and struggle for their voice and equality in the industry. Furthermore, it has helped in establishing the position of both the male and female gender by using the patterned way of portraying them in the media. The 1950s thus witnessed the

²⁶ Ibid., 30.

²⁷ Ibid., 197.

²⁸ Ibid., 47.

rise of an American icon – Marilyn Monroe – who today serves as an example of all the conceptions, standardizations and gender struggles that marked the decade.

BECOMING MARILYN MONROE

Norma Jeane Baker – who in the 1950s became known as Marilyn Monroe - was born in 1926. She was an orphan, spending her youth in different foster homes due to her mother’s mental illness. Her father left before she was born and she never met him. In her unfinished autobiography, Norma Jean says “[t]hat was my first happy time, finding my father’s picture. And every time I remembered how he smiled ... I felt warm and not alone.”²⁹ Norma Jean’s autobiography abounds in the images of a lonely girl, who just needs acceptance and the feeling of belonging. As she remembered her teenage years, she states: “I never dreamed of anyone loving me I compromised by dreaming of my attracting someone’s attention (besides God), of having people look at me and say my name.”³⁰ Well aware of her looks ever since her early years and with a great love for acting, Marilyn was determined that her escape from loneliness and poverty lied in Hollywood. However, her road to stardom proved to be much harder than she had expected.

At the age of sixteen, Norma Jean got married to Jim Dougherty – “the Lochnivar who had rescued me from my blue dress and white blouse.”³¹ The marriage was arranged by her foster parents, who could no longer take care of her and did not want to send her back to the foster home. Nevertheless, the “child bride,” as she called herself, was not rescued by this marriage. As Monroe explains, the insecure and unprotected Norma Jeane was “still alive, still alone.”³² This need to be rescued, protected and belong to somebody represented a big part of Marilyn’s relationship with men. Hence, many times it seemed she was willing to give in to them in return for the feeling of

²⁹ Marilyn Monroe and Ben Hecht. *My Story* (Lanham, MD: Taylor Trade Pub., 2007), 5.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 15.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 30.

³² *Ibid.*, 32.

belonging to someone and not being alone anymore. However, a number of men, and especially the important men in Hollywood, were not interested in protecting Marilyn, but in exploiting her body.

Marilyn Monroe once said, “my popularity seemed almost entirely a masculine phenomenon.”³³ In her case, this statement proved true. Marilyn’s rise to stardom started in the early 1950s, when her short marriage ended and a 19-year-old moved into a room in Hollywood. During that time Hollywood began to exploit female sexuality, while “the producers and the studio remained in control, assigning actors to pictures in ‘their range – and within the range of the audience’s expectations.’”³⁴ For Marilyn, this range meant portraying the physically appealing, sexualized, dumb blonde. Nonetheless, it took a long time before she was even considered to act in such pictures.

Marilyn’s beginnings in Hollywood exemplify the stereotypes, inequality and oppression women in entertainment business struggled with in the 1950s. A beautiful girl, whom Gloria Steinem describes as “whispering, simpering, big-breasted child-woman who was simply hoping her way into total vulnerability,” was a prey to the hungry wolves in the entertainment business, who saw her as a future sex symbol of America.³⁵ In her autobiography, Marilyn reminisces about one of her early auditions when she was abused by a certain Mr. Sylvester. As she explained, during her reading of the script, he asked “Would you please raise your dress a few inches.... A little higher please.”³⁶ She then realized that she was not there for the audition, but for Mr. Sylvester’s pleasure. Monroe stated that his words haunted her “as if I had heard the true voice of Hollywood –

³³ Gloria Steinem and George Barris, *Marilyn: Norma Jeane* (New York: New American Library, 1988), 23.

³⁴ Halliwell, 170.

³⁵ Steinem, 12.

³⁶ Monroe with Hecth, 52.

‘Higher, higher, higher,’” confirming the wide-held belief of Hollywood’s exploitation of women’s sexuality.³⁷

Moreover, Norma Jeane’s journey to stardom was predominately based on her physical appearance and emphasized sexuality, while her psychological and emotional state were highly disregarded and ignored. As she pointed out, “[y]ou are judged by how you look, not by what you are,” adding “I was young, blonde, and curvaceous, and I had learned to talk huskily ... And though these achievements landed me no job they brought a lot of wolves whistling at my heels.”³⁸ These ‘wolves’ were the directors of the biggest production companies in the 1950s Hollywood. Soon after dyeing her hair blonde, she acquired a new name – Marilyn Monroe – required by her first employer, Twentieth Century Fox. The new name was suggested by one of the directors, who wanted it to be more glamorous than Norma Jeane. For Marilyn, the new name meant she “had to get born. And this time better than before.”³⁹ For the company, however, this meant the creation of a commercial product to be exploited by the mass media and the people.

In addition, Twentieth Century Fox was persistent in emphasizing Marilyn’s sexuality by using the “mechanisms by which the industry positioned and contained Monroe as a ‘sex symbol’ who broke social taboos, but never dismantled the ideological hegemony of straight, male sexuality.”⁴⁰ For that reason, Marilyn was the perfect representative of her gender by being unthreatening to the male population and their notions of manhood and masculinity, since “a compliant child-woman like Monroe solves this dilemma by offering sex *without* the power of an adult woman, much less of an equal.”⁴¹ Hence, her subordinate position in the industry, gave the

³⁷ Ibid., 52.

³⁸ Ibid., 53-55.

³⁹ Ibid., 65.

⁴⁰ Will Scheibel, "Marilyn Monroe, ‘Sex Symbol’: Film Performance, Gender Politics and 1950s Hollywood Celebrity," *Celebrity Studies* 4, no. 1 (2013): 4, doi:10.1080/19392397.2012.750095.

⁴¹ Steinem, 23.

directors the control over her and the chance to exploit her looks by displaying her on screen “as erotic object for the spectator within the auditorium.”⁴² As a result, one caption from her promotional campaign picture said: “Marilyn Monroe, the hottest thing in pictures, cooling off.”⁴³ She was becoming the object to be admired, looked at and consumed by every man who needed to affirm his position as the superior gender.⁴⁴

Furthermore, as the 1950s notion of masculinity was believed to be under threat, Twentieth Century Fox carefully had to construct Marilyn’s image according to the prevailing ideologies of that time. As a result, Marilyn was portrayed as glamorous, dumb blonde, who at times was the *femme fatale*.⁴⁵ These epithets followed her throughout her career, leading to her personal dissatisfaction and fruitless struggles to change these perceptions, once again proving the power the media corporations had over her. Sadly, although trying to alter the popular presuppositions, she gave the impression that she too believed she was just a dumb blonde. In *My Story*, she writes about a man whom she called her first love and explains that “[h]e criticized my mind. He kept pointing out how little I knew and how unaware of life I was. It was sort of true.”⁴⁶ She similarly describes one of her conversations with a group of friends: “I hadn’t the finest idea of what people (even women) were talking about. There was no hiding from it – I was terribly dumb.”⁴⁷ These statements confirm both her personal feeling of subordination and the popular ideology of the time that women were not equal to men. Nonetheless, Monroe’s portrayal in the movies was widely accepted by her male public, since with such representations, according to Laura Mulvey, woman “holds the look,

⁴² Mulvey, 838.

⁴³ Monroe with Hecht, 106.

⁴⁴ Mulvey, 838.

⁴⁵ Scheibel, 6.

⁴⁶ Monroe with Hecht, 94.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 138-139.

plays to and signifies male desire,” helping the male project his phantasies and, by doing so, gets the sense of control and possession of that woman.⁴⁸

In addition, numerous marriage proposals Marilyn got during her life, and which she mentions in her autobiography, serve as examples of people’s opinions about her. These marriage proposals range from the unnamed seventy-one-year-old millionaire, to more prominent figures such as respected actor and director George Sanders. The reasons for proposals were usually the same: Marilyn was seen as a lost person, in need of help and economic security, pretty enough to be used as a decoration at public gatherings, but seemingly nothing more than that. Unfortunately, Marilyn seemed to have accepted this ideology as she once explained that “[a] woman needs to ... well, to *support* a man, emotionally ... And man needs to be strong. This is partly what it means to be masculine and feminine ... Men need women to be feminine.”⁴⁹ She herself apparently confirmed the position of woman as the subordinate person in the male/female binary.

As social theorist Raewyn Connell explains, “the power analysis of gender pictured women and men as social blocs linked by a direct power relation,” and the 1950s movies were unquestionably used to confirm this order.⁵⁰ Monroe’s portrayal of the gold-digging, dumb blonde in most of her movies, among others *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1953) and *Niagara* (1953), and her unsuccessful attempts to get more serious roles, clearly show the power of the directors, who put those below them in the visibly oppressed position. Steinem, furthermore, confirms this argument by stating that the “lack of self-confidence, is the emotional training that helps to keep any less-than-equal group in its place.”⁵¹ In Marilyn’s case this training was apparent through her inability to change her public image and become more respected as an actress and less as a sex symbol, which

⁴⁸ Mulvey, 839.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 118.

⁵⁰ R. W Connell, *Gender and Power: Society, the Person and Sexual Politics* (Cambridge: Polity, 2009), 34.

⁵¹ Steinem, 114.

left her with no other solution than to abide by the rules of her employers. Even though she seemed aware of the fact that the studios exploited her, she tried to find satisfaction in feeling important. As she explained, “I liked the fact that I was important in making them a great financial success ... despite that its chief had considered me unphotogenic [*sic*]. I liked the fact that the movie salesmen ... whistled loudest and longest when I entered their midst.”⁵²

However, at the peak of her career, America’s most popular blonde’s life started to crumble, both professionally and personally. As she points out in her autobiography, “instead of being happy over all these fairytale things that happened to me I grew depressed and finally desperate.”⁵³ The influence of the patriarchal and hegemonic society she was living in effectively managed her star image and presented her as a “fairly frivolous, fairly foolish young woman,” the image she never succeeded in overcoming.⁵⁴ The sex symbol image she resembled “epitomize[d] the post-war feminine ideal ... and also the ways in which sexuality is narrowly defined and policed by institutions of power.”⁵⁵ In Marilyn’s case this was Twentieth Century Fox, at that time led by the powerful Darryl F. Zanuck. As Richard Dyer points out, “Monroe has also come to symbolize the exploitation of woman as spectacle in film,” through her overly emphasized sexuality and overly disregarded capacity as an actress, the conceptions which, I will argue, were some of the main contributors to her tragic end.⁵⁶

In the same way, but almost forty years after Marilyn’s arduous breakthrough in Hollywood, another future superstar started to pave her way to success and the achievement of the American Dream. Whitney Houston stands as a representative of the female struggle on the pop culture scene in the late 1980s. The machinery used for creating Monroe’s star image was similarly applied on

⁵² Monroe with Hecht, 149.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 149.

⁵⁴ Scheibel, 11.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁵⁶ Dyer, *Stars*, 44.

Houston. Powerful corporations modeled her public persona in the way which appealed to the wide audiences and her image was used for company profit. Houston's professional and public life bears a lot of similarities to Marilyn's, making them the representatives of the prevalent ideologies of the 1950s and the 1980s, respectively.

LIFE IN THE 1980s

According to the author of *American Culture in the 1980s* (2007), Graham Thompson, the 1980s was a decade marked by “an increasingly multicultural society” in which “different interest groups found it necessary to defend their cultural positions.”⁵⁷ Nonetheless, the presidency of Ronald Reagan during the 80s, as Thompson points out, “relied on a core of white male support.”⁵⁸ Correspondingly, his support among women and African Americans was much weaker. This imbalance stemmed from “the most potent form of identity politics in our time: a huddling of men who resent (and exaggerate) their relative decline not only in parts of the labor market but at home.”⁵⁹ Similarly to the 1950s, in which the rise of feminism threatened masculinity, the 1980s represented the decade where men felt their masculinity was endangered. As popular culture critic Joseph Vogel points out, the 1980s represented a decade in which America needed “real men – men who reclaimed a ‘deep masculinity,’ a warrior mentality that had gone missing in postcivil [sic] rights culture.”⁶⁰ Besides feminism, the new threat for masculinity was also caused by multiculturalism. As Thompson explains, “white men perceived themselves to be under threat from discourses that attacked the preponderance of WASP (White Anglo-Saxon Protestant),” while different groups tried to “recognize cultural production and activity that was not white.”⁶¹ Hence,

⁵⁷ Thompson, *American Culture in the 1980s*, 33.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ Joseph Vogel, "Freaks in the Reagan Era: James Baldwin, the New Pop Cinema, and the American Ideal of Manhood," *The Journal of Popular Culture* 48, no. 3 (2015): 464.

⁶¹ Thompson, 30-33.

the culture wars took over the scene during the 1980s, in which “the idea of difference underlay their sense of a politics of identity.”⁶² The music industry showed to be one of the arenas where these culture wars were fought, witnessing the rise of the new genres, such as Rap and Hip Hop – which became the hallmark of the African American performers.

Furthermore, with the globalization and the attempts of the US to gain control and economic prosperity by putting its products on the global market, the music industry was seen as a lucrative business. Thus, “music labels were being brought under the umbrella of a handful of powerful multinational organizations driven by the same synergistic principles affecting all dimensions of the media world.”⁶³ As a result, the music star’s image had to be appealing and convincing to the audience and it was thus carefully constructed through television appearances, interviews and music. Here again, we can see that the star image is an object of constructions - that is, someone needs to be in control of the market and carefully select the candidate, who will fit the global arena. However, similarly to the 1950s, in the 1980s women once again experienced the struggle to fit into the cultural world predominantly created for men.

Gender inequality and female exploitation were still highly visible during the 1980s; however, the issue of race that emerged during the decades leading to the 1980s became its important counterpart. With regard to gender, this decade marked the beginning of the new wave of feminism, where women, and especially women of color, were still subjected to unequal treatment.⁶⁴ Thus the representation of women’s roles in popular culture displayed this tension. As Thompson explains, television witnessed “the declining number of independent female leads, ... while in film the apotheosis of the cultural backlash against women was achieved.”⁶⁵ Furthermore,

⁶² Ibid., 31.

⁶³ Ibid., 132.

⁶⁴ Patricia Leavy and Adrienne Trier-Bieniek, *Gender & Pop Culture: A Text-Reader* (Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2014), 8.

⁶⁵ Thompson, 32.

in the midst of the culture wars and white men's disapproval of rising multiculturalism, being a woman of color further complicated the position of women in 1980s America. Based on critical theorist Nina Cartier's ideas, "[t]o be black still carries stigma, and as we create ourselves anew to bend and shape to perform some version of what we 'should be,' ... we are constantly thwarted as a result of what we are: black, and thus never equal and never quite human."⁶⁶ Hence, a black woman struggles not only to be human, since, Cartier explains, "[l]ike her female screen counterparts, she is not a man, and thus not a person," but also to be a woman, because "her epidermis prevents her from fully entering the realm of desire."⁶⁷ Accordingly, the rise of a black female superstar and the creation of the star image has to be even more carefully constructed and presented in order to achieve the national and international recognition and acceptance. Nevertheless, this forcefully created image has strong effects on the star's personality and often leads to issues of personal dissatisfaction due to an inability to conform to and satisfy the expectations of the men in charge and the public. An illustration of these issues and the problem of the highly controlled public image required by the media corporations can be seen through Whitney Houston, who, I will argue, was unable to meet the expectations of people around her. These expectations, or Houston's inability to meet them, led to her personal dissatisfaction and a lifestyle that resulted in her early end.

"IT IS TIME TO BE WHITNEY HOUSTON"

Whitney Elizabeth Houston was born a year after the death of the American sweetheart Marilyn Monroe. Although the political and social situation in America in the periods when these two superstars lived had changed a lot, the lives of the two women resembled one another in many aspects. Both of them had similar aspirations, those of conquering the world with their talents and

⁶⁶ Nina Cartier, "Black Women On-Screen as Future Texts: A New Look at Black Pop Culture Representations," *Cinema Journal* 53, no. 4 (2014): 152, doi:10.1353/cj.2014.0050.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 152.

being loved and recognized by the masses; both started out as models and continued to become famous singers and actresses; both struggled with drug abuse and tragically ended their lives by overdosing. Similarly, inside both of these women lived a very insecure girl whose only wish was to be accepted and loved. In addition, both of these, then inexperienced, teenagers entered the media machinery, became extremely popular and, equally fast, extremely dissatisfied and self-destructive. Seemingly, the same forces, mainly the powerful media corporations and its directors, namely Darryl F. Zanuck and Clive Davis, who were in charge of creating Monroe's and Houston's star image, contributed both to their breakthrough and to their downfall.

The emotional support Whitney had from her family, alongside the family examples of what the music industry required from a performer, should have made Whitney far more aware of what stardom represented. Nevertheless, being the youngest child and the only girl, Whitney was very protected and thus very unaware of life outside of New Jersey suburbia. Cissy Houston, Whitney's mother, explains that “[w]hat I never anticipated was that, in trying to give my children a better life and shield them from hardships, they might end up less prepared to face the kind of trauma that life inevitably throws your way.”⁶⁸ Sadly, “an intriguing blend of knowledgeable and naïve,” that Whitney was, she had to learn the hardships of stardom on her own.⁶⁹

As the daughter of the famous singer Cissy Houston and the first cousin of Dionne Warwick, Whitney Houston was believed by many to be predestined to become a star. At the age of twelve, the future top recording artist decided she wanted to become a singer and, with her mother's guidance, started training her voice. Cissy reminisces how unsure she was of her daughter's decision, since “the girl who wanted so badly to be liked and was so easily bullied by her

⁶⁸ Cissy Houston, Dionne Warwick, and Lisa Dickey, *Remembering Whitney: My Story of Love, Loss, and the Night the Music Stopped* (New York: HarperCollins, 2013), 44.

⁶⁹ Narada Michael Walden and Richard Buskin, *Whitney Houston: The Voice, the Music, the Inspiration* (San Rafael, CA: Insight, 2013), 13.

schoolmates, could face the rigors and meanness of that world.”⁷⁰ Nonetheless, she agreed to tutor Whitney and soon, the twelve-year-old had her first church performance. Hence, Houston’s musical career had started long before she got worldwide recognition by singing the second vocals and occasionally having a solo performance in church and on her mother’s gigs.

Furthermore, during her teenage years, she tried herself out as a model, posing for the covers of numerous magazines, among others the magazine *Seventeen*, which made her one of the first black women to have been on its cover.⁷¹ Her exceptional beauty, accompanied by the unique voice, attracted the attention of the musical industry, and she had been offered the contract by Arista studio scout Gerry Griffith several times before finally signing one. Nevertheless, it was her physical appearance that played the most important role at the beginning of her career. As her mother points out, “Nippy was radiant.... I wasn’t completely surprised that it was her looks rather than her voice that first pushed her into the spotlight.”⁷² This statement, in addition to Whitney’s beginnings as a model, supports Richard Dyer’s notion that one of the criteria for creating the star image is physical appearance and attractiveness.

Moreover, as Marilyn said that her popularity was mostly a masculine phenomenon, it could be said that Whitney’s rise to stardom and the construction of her star image were mainly a masculine creation. A number of people who worked closely with Houston and have written books about her, such as her mother Cissy and her band member Narada Michael Walden, praise and acknowledge Clive Davis – a man without whose support Whitney’s first records would not be heard “everywhere, every hour, on the hour.”⁷³ Clive Davis or the ‘Music Man’, was the creator of the Arista Records that Whitney had previously signed with.⁷⁴ Davis was responsible for launching

⁷⁰ Houston, *Remembering Whitney*, 77.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 95.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 94.

⁷³ Walden, 13.

⁷⁴ Houston, *Remembering Whitney*, 114.

Whitney's career in the mid-80s and gave her "the big push ... when he put his mack [*sic*] hand down."⁷⁵ According to Cissy Houston, Davis "wanted to craft her image, and he wanted to make absolutely sure they chose the right songs and producers for her debut."⁷⁶ Here again, as has been seen in the case of Monroe and Twentieth Century Fox, the production companies, led by influential men, orchestrated the way in which Whitney's career would go.

Upon the release of her first album, *Whitney Houston*, in 1985, in order to promote it, she started constant touring. These performances were carefully scheduled by Clive Davis.⁷⁷ The album soon hit Number One on the charts and was followed by *Whitney* in 1987 and *I'm Your Baby Tonight* in 1990. Both became international hits. As a result, Houston became surrounded by the managers deciding on her stage wardrobe and her performances. Consequently, she discovered "what it was like to suddenly have your time belong to other people," while at the same time be lonely.⁷⁸ Much as in the case of Monroe, the machinery used to create a superstar focused solely on Houston's promotion and profit gained from her popularity, disregarding her personal needs and weaknesses. For the corporations, one of stars' main responsibilities is to appeal to their public and abide by the wishes of their employers. Thus stars, here exemplified through Marilyn Monroe and Whitney Houston, end up with the feeling of loneliness and a task of discovering who they have become and what is left of their own personalities.

Likewise, Raewyn Connell explains that the need for profit in a capitalistic society such as the United States is closely connected to the exploitation of women.⁷⁹ With regard to the movie and music industry, this is partly done by creating a pleasurable physical appearance, which men can

⁷⁵ Walden, 13.

⁷⁶ Houston, *Remembering Whitney*, 114-115.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 117-118.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁷⁹ Connell, 35.

use for enjoyment and confirmation of control over the subordinate females.⁸⁰ Thus, as musical videos gained popularity in the 1980s, so did the producers see the profit in them and put a lot of effort into presenting the singers in a pleasurable manner. As a result, many videos for Whitney's first album, and especially the *I Wanna Dance With Somebody* video, "are notable for eschewing 'soft porn' and gimmicks," presented through different costumes, dancing and "well-structured visage."⁸¹ As Narada Michael Walden explains, *I Wanna Dance With Somebody* "needed to be funky, it needed to be dirty, because it had to move the ghetto as well as the Onassis boat."⁸² Thus, the author of "Whitney is Every Woman?: Cultural Politics and the Pop Star," Marla Shelton, argues that "the visual style of soul and R&B music dissipated with Houston's adoption of music video promotion."⁸³ The methods used for filming Whitney Houston's videos serve both as the indicator of the exploitation of the female's superstar image as an object of consumption and as the indicator of distancing Whitney from her African American roots.

In addition, as Houston's fame rose, so did the criticism regarding her work. Whitney's music was directed towards the mainstream and as such was labeled as Pop, rather than R&B, which in the 1980s was a genre performed by the black artists. This genre-crossing was not well accepted by her black audience, which criticized her for having "'sold out' or [being] 'too white.'"⁸⁴ Furthermore, this shift from African American roots and going into the mainstream in order to reach the bigger audiences could be an important aspect of the loss of personality among the black stars. Whitney Houston, a girl who only wanted for everyone to like her, but instead ended up being

⁸⁰ Mulvey, 839.

⁸¹ Camera Obscura: "Whitney Is Every Woman?: Cultural Politics And The Pop Star," accessed March 31, 2019, <http://www.classicwhitney.com/interview/cameraobscura1995.htm>.

⁸² Walden, 23.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Jaap Kooijman, "The True Voice of Whitney Houston: Commodification, Authenticity, and African American Superstardom," *Celebrity Studies* 5, no. 3, (2014): 305, doi:10.1080/19392397.2014.911110.

booed by her black audience at the Third Annual Soul Train Music Awards, was certainly one to be affected by the disapproval of her black community.⁸⁵ As American Studies scholar Jaap Kooijman points out, “once black artists do, against all odds, ‘cross over’ to a bigger audience, their fight becomes one of remaining black.”⁸⁶ The idea of ‘remaining black’ clearly points to the personality struggle that the stars face during their careers. In addition, as *Billboard* music editor Nelson George explains, “Whitney had the [chance] to reintroduce soul music ‘cause she is a soul child, ... but she was marketed as a pop product.”⁸⁷ This marketing strategy supports the idea of the control the studios and the producers have over the market and over stars, regardless of the negative consequences on stars’ personas.

In short, in the eyes of the production companies and directors, Whitney Houston was seen as an international product, who could be successfully sold to a mainstream audience – mainly consisting of the white population – and was used accordingly, despite her increasing personal dissatisfaction and her sense of losing her personality. As was the case with Marilyn Monroe, so also Whitney Houston’s star was image predominantly controlled by the media conglomerates, which almost four decades after the era of Monroe still demonstrated their power and superiority in the entertainment industry. The pressure the two stars felt from their employers and the exploitation of their images likely contributed and speeded up their downfall. Both their personal and professional declines began at the peak of their careers and were marked by heavy drug abuse and an apparent loss of identity.

⁸⁵ Walden, 72.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 308.

⁸⁷ Interviews: *Essence* December 1990, accessed March 31, 2019, http://www.classicwhitney.com/interview/essence_1990.htm.

CHAPTER II – BLACK MARILYN/ WHITE WHITNEY

THE ISSUE OF WHITENESS

The myth of Marilyn Monroe lives to this day. She was and still is the symbol of America, the white, sweet angel of sex, sensual, but at the same time innocent. As Lois W. Banner explains, Marilyn's whiteness represents an important aspect in the formation of cultural and individual identity through the interaction between 'race, sexuality, gender, and class.'⁸⁸ Whitney Houston, on the other hand, has still not achieved this status. Although her case also raises questions about "the politics of race, class, gender, sexuality," Whitney's influence on society still has to be determined.⁸⁹ Has it been prolonged because she was black? As Nina Cartier explains, to be black means to be "never equal and never quite human."⁹⁰ Presumably, by not being white and with being 'less human,' Whitney does not fulfil the standards needed for Whitney to be mythicized. This chapter will start by discussing what whiteness is and what constitutes the idea of whiteness, based on Richard Dyer's theory in *White* (1997). Furthermore, the chapter will deal with the question: Was Whitney really black and, correspondingly, was Marilyn really white? Finally, was the lack of certain properties that constitute whiteness what prevented them from fully succeeding and led them into self-destruction and death?

Racial inequality in the United States has long been one of the nation's major issues, accompanied by the struggle for gender equality. As Dyer points out, the sense of belonging to a white race "developed in the USA in the nineteenth century as part of the process of establishing

⁸⁸ Lois W. Banner, "The Creature from the Black Lagoon: Marilyn Monroe and Whiteness," *Cinema Journal* 47, no. 4, (Summer 2008): 4, doi:10.1353/cj.0.0030.

⁸⁹ Camera Obscura: "Whitney Is Every Woman?: Cultural Politics And The Pop Star," accessed March 31, 2019, <http://www.classicwhitney.com/interview/cameraobscura1995.htm>.

⁹⁰ Cartier, "Black Women On-Screen," 152.

US identity.”⁹¹ Hence, the fight for the equal representation among the African Americans in particular has been marked by the major political and cultural movements, for instance the Civil Rights Movement during the 1950s and 1960s. Nevertheless, even today, the sense of inequality is still present and African Americans still persist in fighting against it, both in their everyday lives and in the entertainment business. This unequal treatment, Dyer explains, stems from not the race *per se*, since “race in itself ... refers to some intrinsically insignificant geographical/physical differences between people,” but from the imagery of race.⁹² As he identifies it, “[r]acial imagery is central to the organization of the modern world.”⁹³ Racial imagery includes different aspects of social system, from job accessibility and housing to access to healthcare and education. Moreover, these racial images are only applied to non-white people, while whiteness remains “the unmarked category which ... never has to speak its name, never has to acknowledge its role as an organizing principle in social and cultural relations.”⁹⁴ Therefore, white people are just people, whereas others are marked and raced. Accordingly, by being just human, the white person claims the power to speak for the whole humanity, while raced persons can only speak for their race. Moreover, to be white means to be privileged and not be stereotyped in relation to whiteness.

Culturally, stereotyping is used to characterize “the representation of subordinated social groups and is one of the means by which they are categorized and kept in their place.”⁹⁵ As a result, as sociologist Ashley W. Done explains, whiteness has played “a key role in inter-group relations, especially in terms of enabling the dominant group to maintain its position atop the ethnic

⁹¹ Richard Dyer, *White*, (New York: Routledge, 1997), 19.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 1.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ Douglas Hartmann, Joseph Gerteis, and Paul R. Croll, "An Empirical Assessment of Whiteness Theory: Hidden from How Many?" *Social Problems* 56, no. 3 (2009): 404, doi:10.1525/sp.2009.56.3.403.

⁹⁵ Dyer, *White*, 12.

hierarchy.”⁹⁶ The power that white people assume thus makes them “create the dominant images of the world,” and “set the standards of humanity by which they are bound to succeed and others bound to fail.”⁹⁷ This explains the struggle that non-whites experience in establishing themselves in representation both outside and inside media circles. The postmodern multiculturalism in the United States, although present, still suffers from the attempts of homogenization through Hollywood movies and popular TV programs. The solution to this problem, Dyer suggests, is ending the rule of the whiteness. However, in order to understand what whiteness is and who can claim it, different aspects have to be taken into consideration.

In *White*, Dyer identifies three elements that constitute whiteness: Christianity, race and enterprise and imperialism. Christianity is founded on the idea of incarnation, “of being that is in the body and yet not of it.”⁹⁸ The ‘spirit,’ or ‘mind’ inside of the body is the important aspect of the mind/body duality in Christianity, since it is regarded as superior, whereas the body is often seen as evil. Moreover, this duality is identified in gender in the examples of Mary and Christ. As Dyer explains “[b]oth Mary and Christ provide models of behavior and being to which humans may aspire.”⁹⁹ Mary does nothing and has no carnal knowledge; she is the image of “passivity, expectancy, receptivity, a kind of sacred readiness, ... all of this constituting a given purity and state of grace.”¹⁰⁰ Christ, on the other hand, is seen as God and thus represents the epitome of divinity and humanity. Nevertheless, these exceptional models of behavior are unattainable, but serve as examples of what people should aspire to be like. Dyer explains that these aspirations thus constitute “suffering, self-denial and self-control, and also material achievement, ... something of a

⁹⁶ Ashley W. Doane, "Dominant Group Ethnic Identity in the United States: The Role of "Hidden" Ethnicity in Intergroup Relations," *The Sociological Quarterly* 38, no. 3 (1997): 376.

⁹⁷ Dyer, *White*, 9.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 16-17.

thumbnail sketch of the white ideal.”¹⁰¹ Interestingly, this conceptualization immediately puts women in the inferior position to such an extent that, by not being male, they do not ever stand a chance of being fully human.

Many theorists have agreed that ‘race’ is a cultural construct, used as a means to categorize differences in people’s skin tone. Nevertheless, the author of *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture* (2012), John Storey explains that “the power of whiteness is that it seems to exist outside categories of ‘race’ and ethnicity.”¹⁰² Historically, the idea of white people representing the human race comes from the Aryan and Caucasian model, groups of people who lived in the mountains and were “small, virtuous and ‘pure’ communities.”¹⁰³ The geographical position of these peoples and their nearness to God, formed the white character. Hence, today, Dyer explains that white people represent “the only sub-race that has remained pure to the human race’s Aryan forbears.... Non-whites then become seen as degenerative, falling away from the true nature of the (human) race.”¹⁰⁴ Accordingly, Dyer assumes that members of the white race are the ultimate winners, “either they are a distinct, pure race, superior to all others, or else they are the purest expression of the human race itself.”¹⁰⁵ Nonetheless, the racial purity of whiteness is endangered by miscegenation. Interracial sexuality threatens whiteness by making white bodies no longer white and, as a result, diminishes the power of whiteness by staining it with another color.¹⁰⁶ Hence, throughout history, in the United States measures were taken in order to prevent blackness from ever accessing the white territory. Similar to women, black people, solely for their color, were denied the possibility of ever being seen as fully human.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² John Storey, *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: An Introduction* (Harlow, England: Pearson, 2012), 183.

¹⁰³ Dyer, *White*, 21.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 22.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Storey, 174.

Apart from miscegenation and the problem it creates in relation to whiteness, sexuality is similarly problematic and differently approached between men and women. As Dyer illustrates, “[g]ender difference underpins male:female power difference and is realized in and through heterosexuality.”¹⁰⁷ Both men and women have ‘dark’ sex desires. However, for white men, these desires are seen as “the tragic quality of their giving way to darkness and the heroism of their channeling or resisting it.”¹⁰⁸ Thus men, although fallible, have the will power to transcend this challenge. Women, on the other hand, are biblically not supposed to have these desires to start with and by having them they are labeled as ‘fallen women.’ Dyer explains that, the result of women’s desires is the fall from whiteness. Thus women, although white, are able to exercise their power only over non-white people, once again reaffirming the subordinate position of women in the white male society.

The third embodiment of whiteness, enterprise and imperialism, intersects with both race and gender. As Dyer points out, “enterprise as an aspect of spirit is associated with the concept of will – the control of self and the control of others.”¹⁰⁹ With regard to whiteness, it is the white people’s qualities that lead the humanity and accordingly put them in the position of rulers. Storey adds that, in the 18th and 19th century, the white man was praised as “the most beautiful of the human race,” the only one able to think and govern the world.¹¹⁰ Thus, as the product of enterprise, imperialism occurred and was exercised through colonialism. In imperial narrative, on which the United States was formed, the white woman and white man binary is seen through the “woman as the locus of true whiteness, white men in struggle, ... facing the dangers and allures of darkness.”¹¹¹ Furthermore, through imperialism the white man established the position of being a ‘subject

¹⁰⁷ Dyer, *White*, 27.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 28.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 31.

¹¹⁰ Storey, 173-175.

¹¹¹ Dyer, *White*, 36.

without properties,' which according to Dyer means that non-whites are "particular, marked, raced, whereas the white man has attained the position of being without properties, unmarked, universal, just human."¹¹² Nonetheless, as Dyer suggests, to be a subject without properties, as white people are, implies not being at all – that is, not existing, or being dead.

These aspects, namely Christianity, race and enterprise and imperialism are the three main elements in the formation of whiteness. Thus it is these three aspects and what constitutes them that will be used in this chapter to analyze the lives and careers of Marilyn Monroe and Whitney Houston. Dyer's theory of whiteness will be used as a tool to analyze different types of oppressions both in everyday life and in the entertainment business that Monroe and Houston had experienced. The intention of this chapter will be to show to what extent has whiteness, and with it white male superiority, contributed to the rise and fall of two icons, Marilyn Monroe and Whitney Houston. Was it their lack of whiteness that led them to their tragic ends, or was it perhaps them being too white that caused their premature deaths?

IS MARILYN MONROE WHITE?

Whiteness has played an important role in the construction of American identities. Thus it is not far-fetched to say that to be white is equal to being American and a true representative of American ideology. Whiteness symbolizes superiority, privilege and a racial purity that no other race could ever attain. Moreover, for women, whiteness represents the achievement of the status of the 'White Goddess,' an important part of the Western representations in which, as historian Lois W. Banner explains, the white woman is seen as a valuable possession of white men.¹¹³ Likewise, to be darker, means to be inferior. As Richard Dyer points out, "[g]ender differentiation is crossed with that of class: lower-class women may be darker than upper-class men; to be a lady is to be as

¹¹² Ibid., 38.

¹¹³ Banner, 6.

white as it gets.”¹¹⁴ As the 1950s was the decade in which the war-shaken American identity needed to be reaffirmed, the emphasis of whiteness through the rise of Hollywood blondes suggests one example through which this identity was strengthened. During the same time, a young brunette was in the process of becoming the most popular blonde in the world.

Marilyn Monroe has always been the epitome of white. Her star image was carefully constructed in order to portray her as “every man’s love affair with America,” as Norman Mailer describes her in *Marilyn*.¹¹⁵ Her blonde hair, light skin, white clothes, all suggest her attempt to reach the ideal whiteness. However, her overly emphasized sexuality, her natural brunette hair color and her inability to have children, among others, imply that Marilyn was not completely white. With regard to Dyer’s theory of white and the aspects needed in order to achieve it, Marilyn seems to both embody and disrupt them at the same time. Her dual nature, that of white and black, points out the unbalanced person she had become during the years of her popularity. Disruptive behavior she illustrated concerning her whiteness is an example of her struggle to find out who she became and who she used to be before the spotlights turned on.

As Dyer explains, Christianity is one of the embodiments of whiteness. Marilyn’s relationship with Christianity and God was as much conventional as it was unusual. In her autobiography, Marilyn said of her childhood days, “He [God] loved me and watched over me.... I used to draw pictures of God whenever I had time.”¹¹⁶ Obviously, the lonely and abandoned girl found her feeling of belonging and protection in God. Nonetheless, her church experiences portray a very uncommon behavior. As she described it, “[n]o sooner was I in the pew with the organ playing ... than the impulse would come to me to take off all my clothes. I wanted so desperately to

¹¹⁴ Dyer, *White*, 57.

¹¹⁵ Norman Mailer, *Marilyn*, (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1973), 15.

¹¹⁶ Monroe with Hecht, *My Story*, 13.

stand up naked for God and everyone else to see.”¹¹⁷ The need to expose the body can thus be connected to the mind/body duality, where body is regarded as evil and inferior to the mind, which accordingly disrupts the purity of the religious belief and whiteness.¹¹⁸

Furthermore, Marilyn’s associations with Judaism, upon her marriage with Arthur Miller in 1956, also imply her disconnection from whiteness. As a bride-to-be, Marilyn devoted her time to learning about Judaism in order to get closer to her future husband’s tradition.¹¹⁹ Her excursion to Judaism darkened her whiteness with regard to both Christianity and race. As Dyer explains, the category of sometime whites, of people who “may be let in to whiteness under particular historical circumstances,” includes Jews.¹²⁰ Hence, both Marilyn’s religious and racial purity were stained and destabilized her position in the superior white society.

In addition, her emphasized sexuality throughout her life distanced Marilyn from the ideal of whiteness and brought her closer to that of the ‘fallen woman.’ Ideologically, Marilyn was not supposed to have any sexual drives, let alone publicly show them off and change lovers on a regular basis. Her association with sexuality thus suggests her fall from whiteness, since she did not meet the expectations of what a white woman should be, that is “the Virgin Mary, a pure vessel for reproduction who is unsullied by the dark drives that reproduction entails.”¹²¹ Moreover, her inability to have children, and accordingly contribute to white society, is yet another example of Marilyn’s dark side. Dyer states that “[a]s the literal bearers of children, ... women are the indispensable means by which the group - the race – is in every sense reproduced.”¹²² Hence, by

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Dyer, *White*, 16.

¹¹⁹ Steinem, *Marilyn: Norma Jeane*, 151.

¹²⁰ Dyer, *White*, 19.

¹²¹ Ibid., 29.

¹²² Ibid.

being overly sexual and with no children to secure the white society's reproduction, she does not completely fulfill the racial aspect that constitutes whiteness.

Similarly, as Dyer points out, the enterprise and imperialism helped white men to establish their position as 'subjects without properties.'¹²³ However, in this aspect of whiteness Marilyn also turns black. As Clara Juncker suggests in her book *Circling Marilyn: Text, Body, Performance*, by using African American elements in her performances, Monroe inhabits "a sexual space usually reserved for women of African descent."¹²⁴ Furthermore, by dyeing her hair blonde, which implied that she was not blonde and was thus non-white, much like black women, Marilyn also suffered from "internalized racism" and was "forever terrorized by a standard of beauty" she was unable to achieve.¹²⁵ Self-proclaimed 'slave' of the Hollywood system, Monroe compared her position in the entertainment world to that of black slaves, who are one of the trademarks of colonial America.¹²⁶ Her identification with slaves, suggests Banner, indicates that "beneath the whiteness of her external self lay a sense of self as a working-class girl who represented the disadvantaged, ... 'an enlisted man's girl.'"¹²⁷ Much like people of color then, Marilyn too shows to be marked and particular, in contrast to the unmarked whites, once again exemplifying her fall from whiteness and the inferior position in the society she had to conform to.

However, despite Marilyn's apparent lack of constituents that fully embody whiteness, her employers – Twentieth Century Fox – alongside the media kept on portraying her as white. As Dyer explains, "[t]he superiority of whiteness has been felt in terms of beauty."¹²⁸ Accordingly, the whiter Marilyn was, the more beautiful she became and hence helped in confirming the superiority

¹²³ Ibid., 38.

¹²⁴ Clara Juncker, *Circling Marilyn: Text, Body, Performance* (Odense: University Press of Southern Denmark, 2010), 94.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Banner, 15.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 16.

¹²⁸ Dyer, *White*, 70.

of whites, while bringing profit to the production companies. Starting her career as a brunette model, Marilyn seemingly became whiter as her popularity rose. Her hair became platinum blonde and became a symbol of the popular view of the blondes during the 1950s as “conformist and rebellious, innocent and erotic, racialized and beyond race,” explains Banner.¹²⁹ Moreover, her pale skin and often white gowns and suits suggest her contribution to the construction of whiteness.

One of her most famous photos from 1954 shows Marilyn in a white dress, platinum blonde hair and white undergarments posing in front of the camera, while the air from the subway grate blows up her dress, uncovering her pale skin. Against the black background she truly resembles the ‘angel of sex.’ She is a vision in white, allowing men to enjoy the spectacle and rebuild their shaken identity. Additionally, as Dyer argues, the effects used to present Marilyn as glowing and as separated from the environment also serve as indicators of the racial hierarchy. As he points out, “[p]eople who are not white can and are lit to be individualized, arranged hierarchically and kept separate from their environment.”¹³⁰ Nevertheless, this photo appears to indicate the triumph of white culture, in which radiant Marilyn stands as the archetypal white woman who fosters “individualism in white men ... ‘reproducing a construction of white womanhood that allows white women to signify and enact ... whiteness ... without inhabiting the subject position reserved for the white men.’”¹³¹

1954 was an eventful year for Marilyn Monroe. By marrying American national baseball hero Joe DiMaggio, Marilyn became even more popular and soon came to represent America. During her honeymoon trip to Japan, Marilyn was invited to visit American troops in Korea and entertain the soldiers. First, she sang in front of the wounded soldiers in a hospital, trying to encourage them and lift their spirits up and afterwards she went on to give a concert in front of the

¹²⁹ Banner, 12.

¹³⁰ Dyer, *White*, 103.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 30.

excited soldiers, who could not wait to see the American Blonde Bombshell.¹³² Marilyn was a picture of America, sensual and beautiful, wearing a dark blue dress, red lipstick and her blonde hair, as if to purposefully match the colors of the American flag. That day, Marilyn served as a symbol of what the soldiers were fighting for, that is – America and its superiority in the world. White Marilyn was there to remind them that they needed to defend the whiteness of their country.

The white Marilyn reached her peak point in May, 1962, just three months before she died, at the celebration of President John F. Kennedy's birthday. The performance may be interpreted as a cry for help, or the announcement of her death – since Dyer identifies that one of the interpretations of whiteness is that of not being, or, in other words, being dead. Gloria Steinem explains that during that time Marilyn “was more and more dependent on pills, on trips to her psychiatrist, and on phantasies.”¹³³ The most popular blonde was slowly deteriorating. The drug abuse caused her career to slow down - she was no longer able to remember the scripts and was even fired from the movie she was working on, due to her tardiness and unprofessionalism. It seemed as if her constant reaching for whiteness was slowly taking its toll.

However, on May 19, 1962, a frightened Marilyn Monroe showed up at Madison Square Garden, obviously intoxicated by pills and champagne, wearing an almost transparent, sparkling dress, with a white fur coat over it, her hair platinum blonde.¹³⁴ With the spotlights directed at her and her breathy rendition of ‘Happy Birthday,’ beaming Marilyn at the same time looked like an apparition and as a “representative of the femininity of the era.”¹³⁵ As Dyer explains, the extreme whiteness in women is represented through them glowing in the light, and by being very white, they

¹³² Monroe with Hecht, 184.

¹³³ Steinem, 169.

¹³⁴ DedicationToMonroe, “Marilyn Monroe-Happy Birthday Mr. President,” YouTube, 3:52, February 16, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y74oWon5VTo>.

¹³⁵ Banner, 14.

help in establishing the ordinary whiteness.¹³⁶ The extreme whiteness is exceptional, exaggerated and striking. It serves as an opposite to the non-particular position ordinary whiteness takes, confirming the ‘subject without properties’ idea. At the same time the duality of extreme and ordinary assures white people that they “can both lay claim to the spirit that aspires to the heights of humanity and yet supposedly speak and act disinterestedly as humanity’s most average and unremarkable representatives,” Dyer states.¹³⁷ As if to serve the white race one last time, Marilyn Monroe reached for the extreme and soon after faded away into the myth.

Whether Marilyn Monroe was truly white or carried the aspects of blackness, it did not prevent the movie industry, photographers and the media from mercilessly exploiting her body and her image. Marilyn’s carefully constructed white image became a symbol in American culture, helping the upset nation in restoring their spirits and their belief in the superiority of whiteness. Modern enterprise seen through production companies and media conglomerates helped in the creation and maintenance of the ‘White Goddess,’ proving to themselves and others that they are the superiors, ‘subjects without properties,’ real humans. However, Marilyn’s premature death shows that perhaps whiteness was too much to bear for her. Marilyn Monroe’s construction into the whiter and whiter version of herself was stretched so far until it finally became transparent. The role of the woman who reproduced whiteness for the sole purpose of empowering men, while getting nothing in return, was something Marilyn seemingly could not handle.

IS WHITNEY HOUSTON BLACK?

Unlike Marilyn Monroe, whose whiteness was apparent both in terms of her race and her physical appearance, Whitney Houston’s case leaves space for a lot of debate. Coming from the family of African Americans, Whitney can by no means be regarded as white, but racially black.

¹³⁶ Dyer, *White*, 222.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 223.

However, taking into account different aspects needed to constitute whiteness, Whitney surely fulfils them and, during the short period of her career, she takes the superior position in the entertainment business, the position traditionally secured for white people. Furthermore, her popularity and success at the beginning of her career suggest that Whitney symbolically turned white and abandoned her black roots. As Marla Shelton explains, the complexity of Whitney's character lies in the fact that her "performance style provokes skepticism about her race and her authenticity because she does not resemble typical R&B singers, nor does she resemble the typical white popular singer."¹³⁸ According to Shelton, Whitney "mixes cultural signifiers by creating a synergy between a Black voice and body and a white music format and theatricality, generating contradictions that force the reconsideration of race-based categories."¹³⁹ However, Whitney not only resembles white aspects through her performance, but also through her personal traits.

The embodiment of Christianity, which Richard Dyer establishes as one aspect of whiteness, undoubtedly plays an important role in Whitney Houston's life. Ever since she was a little girl, Whitney used to go to church with her parents and perform in the church choir. As Cissy Houston explains, Whitney, then a little girl, once told her that "she'd cried and accepted the Savior into her life and heart. And she never let go of that faith, even through all the turmoil and hard times to come."¹⁴⁰ Her faith, as her mother describes, was a quiet one. She would not often go to church, but would often pray and sing gospel songs in which she found her peace.¹⁴¹ In addition, she attended a Catholic school, where she learned discipline and hard work.

Moreover, the beginning of her career was marked by the expected Christian behavior. The young Whitney was graceful and pure. Her onstage performances abounded in her physical

¹³⁸ Camera Obscura: "Whitney Is Every Woman?: Cultural Politics And The Pop Star," accessed March 31, 2019, <http://www.classicwhitney.com/interview/cameraobscura1995.htm>.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Houston, Warwick, and Dickey, *Remembering Whitney*, 75.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

passivity and lady-like, elegant and carefully chosen gowns that emphasized her angelic appearance without being sexually inviting. The main focus was on her voice, the instrument she often used for singing gospel songs such as “Jesus Loves Me.” Contrary to Marilyn and her overly sexualized body, Whitney’s beginnings were devoid of any connection to sensuality. Additionally, the adult Whitney also established herself in the role of mother, which, as Dyer identifies, in Christianity represents the “supreme fulfilment of one’s nature.”¹⁴² It is in these aspects that young Whitney Houston exercised Christian behavior expected from white people.

Although racially black, Whitney’s lighter skin tone and physical features suggest that she was not stereotypically black. Shelton describes Whitney’s physical beauty as “soft, delicate, symmetrical and compatible with idealized dominant European features.”¹⁴³ Furthermore, her popularity and fandom largely consisted of white people, which further contributes to Whitney being seen as white. Additionally, the disapproval of her black fans and the criticism that she sounded “too white” and that she “sold out,” alongside the frequent booing during her performances and shouting ‘Whitey’ instead of ‘Whitney,’ hint at the fact that Whitney no longer occupied the social space created for raced people.¹⁴⁴

As Richard Dyer points out, “being visible as white is a passport to privilege.”¹⁴⁵ Hence, in order for Whitney to become a privileged international superstar, her music needed to be adapted to white audiences and by that “break out of the small Gospel and R&B niche.”¹⁴⁶ Thus the pop sound was adopted and proved like a successful choice for Whitney, who became internationally recognized and let into the world of divas - until then mostly occupied by white women. Her financial success, which came along with her cross-over to the pop culture and gaining international

¹⁴² Dyer, *White*, 17.

¹⁴³ Camera Obscura, <http://www.classicwhitney.com/interview/cameraobscura1995.htm>.

¹⁴⁴ Kooijman, "The True Voice of Whitney Houston," 308.

¹⁴⁵ Dyer, *White*, 44.

¹⁴⁶ Camera Obscura, <http://www.classicwhitney.com/interview/cameraobscura1995.htm>.

recognition, provided Whitney with the privileged status in the society. During the peak of her popularity, she was thus compared to Frank Sinatra and Barbara Streisand, two white icons of the American music scene. Moreover, the white press named Whitney “a racial exception to the musical mainstream.”¹⁴⁷ The success of her portrayal as, not necessarily white, but surely not black either, lies in the carefully crafted image of Whitney as “universal, a body devoid of race, class, and sexual limitations because she relies on her singing voice to transcend these distinctions,” as Shelton explains.¹⁴⁸

Nonetheless, Whitney Houston can also be viewed from the black perspective as an exception, which to an extent challenged the superiority of whiteness and threatened to end it. Due to her skin tone and family background, Whitney could never be completely separated from her black roots and thus could never completely be analyzed through the scope of whiteness. However, Shelton explains that she came to represent a “symbolic mulatto icon where race and class codes are mixed, ... the integration of white and Black America during the 1980s.” As Jaap Kooijman points out, “Houston formed a highly-visible presence of African American upper-middle-class commercial success, showing America (and the world) that boundaries of race could be overcome.”¹⁴⁹ Whitney’s performance of the American national anthem “The Star-Spangled Banner” at the Super Bowl in 1991 put her in the position of representing America. With the Gulf War that America was waging in the Middle-East at that time and with the war-shaken American nation, Whitney’s rendition of the national anthem lifted the spirits and inspired people, both at the stadium and on the battlefield.¹⁵⁰ Whitney was wearing a white tracksuit and a white headband, as if to accentuate her dark skin color or show America that she is a mixture of both, showing them that

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Kooijman, 307.

¹⁵⁰ News, ABC, “Whitney Houston National Anthem Super Bowl Performance Video 1991,” YouTube, 1:21, February 12, 2012, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5bW5Wf_dH7Q.

the unity and overcoming of the racial inequalities in the multicultural nation is possible. The “breathtaking, soul-flavored rendition” of the anthem, as Michael Narada Walden describes it, became a number one hit in America and the most popular version of “The Star-Spangled Banner” in the history of the United States. According to Marc Bego, the author of a *Whitney Houston* biography, the performance was followed by the CD and video cassette release, with the former selling more than 750,000 copies.¹⁵¹ As a result, Whitney was seen as the most patriotic diva in the United States at the time.

Furthermore, similarly to Marilyn’s Korea performance in 1954, in 1991, after the huge success at the Super Bowl, Whitney was invited to perform at the *Welcome Home Heroes* concert in Virginia. The concert was a huge success and according to Cissy Houston “everybody in that hangar just about went crazy.”¹⁵² Whitney was wearing a blue flight suit given to her by the aviators and opened the concert singing “The Star-Spangled Banner,” once again standing as the symbol of multicultural America, proving that the equality among races is indeed possible. As she was leaving the naval base, her mother remembers, the soldiers “spontaneously saluted her - hundreds of men and women, showing their respect and gratitude.”¹⁵³

The late 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s were the years when Whitney Houston conquered the entertainment business. Her international success and numerous number one albums and singles, alongside the movie career she started, made Whitney a national and cultural symbol of America. The success of her movie *The Bodyguard* (1992), where she starred next to Kevin Costner, as Bego points out, “found an accepting audience who never questioned that fact that Whitney was black and Kevin was white.”¹⁵⁴ Discussing this inter-racial movie, Whitney said, “I

¹⁵¹ Mark Bego, *Whitney Houston*, (London: Plexus Publishing Limited, 2012), 85.

¹⁵² Houston, *Remembering Whitney*, 147.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 149.

¹⁵⁴ Bego, 100.

don't think it's a milestone that a black person and a white person made a movie together. I think for people to look at this color-blind *is* a milestone."¹⁵⁵ Although considered daring for its portrayal of inter-racial sexuality, which according to Dyer "threatens the power of whiteness, because it breaks the legitimation of whiteness with reference to the white body," *The Bodyguard* serves as an example of Whitney's strong presence and overtaking of the mainly white scene.¹⁵⁶

The song *I Will Always Love You*, which was used in the movie, became the most famous song in Whitney's career. Interestingly, the song was made and first performed by Dolly Parton, a famous American singer and actress. Contrary to Houston, Parton is the perfect example of white America – blonde, with a pale skin and performing country and pop music. However, Parton's rendition of *I Will Always Love You* never achieved the recognition and popularity as Houston's did. This is to show that American audiences really adored Houston at the beginning of her career and treated her like a musical goddess, disregarding her blackness and letting her into the privileged world of the white people.

Nevertheless, the perfect picture of Whitney Houston began to crumble in the mid-1990s, and her darker sides started to come to light. Whether it was the weary and overly-exploited Whitney who got tired of the 'white' world, or the white people who realized the danger this superstar was to white superiority, Whitney's career was slowly being destabilized by the media, which led to her ultimate self-destruction. Being rarely seen with men and being very quiet about her sexual orientation, Whitney's sexuality became the topic of numerous magazines that suggested she was a lesbian. Alongside came the criticism of her movies, and her record sales started to drop slowly.¹⁵⁷ Thus a sensitive woman, who only ever wanted for people to like her, was now becoming

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Dyer, *White*, 25.

¹⁵⁷ Bego, 77.

a victim of the media. Her marriage to a troublesome black singer, Bobby Brown, in 1992, furthermore accelerated her fall from symbolic whiteness.

The years between the 1997 and 2009 were perhaps the darkest years of Whitney's career and can be used to analyze what whiteness is not and how one manages to distance oneself from whiteness, or is driven away from it. Whitney's constant drug abuse and scandalous behavior in public, in addition to frequent cancellations of her concerts, led to the deterioration of her image and she was no longer considered the privileged diva she once was. Her new albums were labeled as more black and, while it may have been her intention to reach her black audience, this could also be interpreted as Whitney showing that she was particular, marked and raced, contrasting the idea of 'subject without property' that Dyer identifies as one of the accomplishments of the white population.

Furthermore, due to her excessive drug abuse, her physical appearance was no longer that of a beautiful woman, but a skeleton-looking and tired person. Her 2001 performance at Madison Square Garden showed that Whitney was no longer a lady-like, humble girl, but a scarily skinny woman in a revealingly short dress.¹⁵⁸ As Mark Bego states, "Whitney looked so horrific that it was revealed that video technicians had to use a computer technique to blur the image of Whitney."¹⁵⁹ Once considered the embodiment of American pride, who lifted up the nation in the times of trouble, she was now a source of public shame. The devoted Christian woman, who was always very elegant and never sexually inviting, was now uncontrollably jumping on the stage in a very revealing dress. Moreover, the voice that helped her become successful on the predominantly white

¹⁵⁸ "Usher, Mya, Whitney Houston - Wanna Be Startin Somethin - HD (Michael Jackson 30th Anniversary)," YouTube, 5:09, December 08, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bqu4p8UGgus>.

¹⁵⁹ Bego, 153.

public scene became “a gruff and raspy whisper,” thus depriving her of the most important tool she used to establish herself in the business.¹⁶⁰

In 2007, however, after almost a decade of self-destruction and merciless media attacks, Whitney Houston staged a big comeback. With the help of her long-time mentor, Clive Davis, she started working on her new album, while simultaneously she began working on a new movie. Like a phoenix, Whitney was rising from her dark ashes and was starting to gleam again. As Bego describes it, “Whitney looked every bit the picture of health and happiness.”¹⁶¹ Her new album, similarly to her first album *Whitney Houston* (1985), took two years to be produced and was released in 2009. On the album cover, Whitney stands firm and looks straight into the camera. The white dress and the light behind her make her look powerful and strong, as if she were claiming back her position in the world of whiteness. The song and the video for *I Look to You*, which is also the album title, are very symbolic. With the reaffirmed faith in God, Whitney praises and thanks Him for giving her strength in the darkest hours of her life. Christian motifs rise again and in the video Whitney stands alone in a church-like room, in a white dress, with only a ray of light directed at her.¹⁶² As Richard Dyer points out, “[i]dealized white women are bathed in and permeated by light ... they glow,”¹⁶³ and Whitney and her production house seem to have tried to use this quality to reestablish her position in the privileged world.

However, Whitney’s carefully planned comeback did not last long. Unfortunately, the years of drug abuse and dark life made a permanent mark on Whitney’s body and voice. She was no longer able to captivate her audience with her voice, which was betraying her every step of the way. Her grand comeback tour failed miserably, with her terrible singing and often cancelations due to

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 182.

¹⁶² Whitney Houston, “I Look to You (Official Music Video),” YouTube, 4:26, November 14, 2009, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Pze_mdbOK8.

¹⁶³ Dyer, *White*, 122.

her bad physical state. The media attacks were back commenting that “Houston ha[d] become an afterthought or a punch line.”¹⁶⁴ Her fans were leaving the concert halls in disbelief of her bad performance onstage, and there were again rumors about her drug abuse. Ultimately, on February 11, 2012, Whitney Houston “was found ‘underwater’ in her hotel suite bathtub.”¹⁶⁵ Was it her blackness that finally suffocated her, or her inability to achieve the whiteness in the strict and powerful world of whites, that caused her to surrender? Nevertheless, at her funeral, her *The Bodyguard* co-star Kevin Costner said that Whitney’s biggest worries in her life were “Am I good enough? Am I pretty enough? Will they like me? The part that made her great was also the part that made her stumble.”¹⁶⁶ He pointed, in short, at her insecurities, that were possibly created by the huge expectations people surrounding her had. Thus ‘the last American diva,’ as numerous magazines labeled her, left the world with a sense of the failed attempt to disapprove the racial stereotypes that have long followed the black community.

Both Marilyn Monroe and Whitney Houston stand as symbols of the fallen white ideal. Both went to the extreme, stretching their colors to the point of no return. Marilyn’s excessive whiteness proved to be unbearable for her, finally resulting in her overdosing on pills and dying. Whitney took a different path and from being close to entering the white world, she went into total blackness, destroying everything that once suggested she could be white. Still, the lives of these two divas were strongly influenced by the ordinary whites, the superior and powerful multimedia organizations, who although helped them succeed also contributed to their downfalls through merciless attacks on their personas. And as Dyer states, the whites end up winning either way, either through their purity and distinction or through reaffirming themselves as the purest

¹⁶⁴ Bego, 191.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 202.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 210.

expression of the human race.”¹⁶⁷ The examples of Monroe and Houston show that whoever tries to destabilize the power of whiteness is bound to fail. As it proved with the two, to be too white is not to exist, to be black is not to be of the purest race. In addition, to be a woman who challenges the whiteness of men by trying to reach for men’s superior position and undermine their power, will for some prove to be a tragic flaw.

¹⁶⁷ Dyer, *White*, 22.

CHAPTER III – CAN I BE ME?

ARTHUR W. FRANK'S BODY THEORY

The image of a superstar strongly depends on physical appearance. A body, a face and a voice are some of the features that Richard Dyer identifies in *Stars* (1998) as the critical aspects of creating a star image.¹⁶⁸ Accordingly, the star's body attracts a lot of attention and what stars do with the body carries consequences in terms of their popularity. As the privileged representatives of social roles and types, the stars have the responsibility to maintain a particular image of who they are and how they behave in public.¹⁶⁹ However, this perfect image often crumbles, due to numerous reasons such as drugs, alcohol and the general dissatisfaction of the person holding the image. The destruction of both the superstars' persona and the superstars' image is usually reflected on their bodies through deterioration, obesity, loss of weight, voice failures, etc. Nonetheless, these physical aspects of the body are just one way of analyzing a person's wellbeing or person's struggles. On a less superficial level, the body could be analyzed sociologically, through its relation to society, a theoretical approach proposed by Arthur W. Frank in his work "For a Sociology of the Body: An Analytical Review."

As Frank explains, "[p]eople construct and use their bodies, though they do not use them in conditions of their own choosing, and their constructions are overlaid with ideologies."¹⁷⁰ This notion closely correlates with the idea of stardom, where stars' images are created according to the prevalent ideologies in a given period. Marilyn Monroe's image as a sex symbol was created, for example, so as to appeal, but not threaten the social order prevalent in 1950s America. Whitney Houston, on the other hand, was made into a symbol of white and black integration during the

¹⁶⁸ Dyer, *Stars*, 11.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁷⁰ Arthur W. Frank, "For a Sociology of the Body: An Analytical Review," in *The Body: Social Process and Cultural Theory*, ed. Mike Featherstone *et al.*, (London: Sage, 1991), 47.

1980s and the 1990s, representing multicultural America; however, without necessarily diminishing the establishment of whiteness.

The importance of bodies in sociology has recently been overlooked. Thus, what Franks shows in his work is how “social systems are built up from the tasks of bodies, which then allows us to understand how bodies can experience their tasks as imposed by a system.”¹⁷¹ According to Frank, the experience of fulfilling the tasks is what makes the body most conscious of itself, and it is during these tasks that the body is conceptualized. Through performing the tasks and acting in relation to some object, the body becomes conscious of itself. Moreover, as it acts, the body asks itself questions, which then provide four elements that help in the body’s realization. In this regard, Frank introduces four dimensions through which the body may operate - control, desire, relation to others and self-relatedness. Frank goes on to explain that, in terms of control, the body “must ask itself how predictable its performance will be.”¹⁷² This control is reflected through what one wants a body to do and what it actually does, since, as Frank explains, the body “retains some contingent will of ‘its’ own.”¹⁷³ In terms of control, the body can either obey or disobey, and it can be predictable or unpredictable. Desire is understood in terms of what the body lacks or produces, and is, moreover, complicated by the consumer culture in which “no desire is unfulfillable and ... no desire can be fully satisfied.”¹⁷⁴ Accordingly, the body is defined as either incomplete or is defined through excess.¹⁷⁵ As for the body’s need to relate to others, it can either be monadic or dyadic. The former stands for a body that is “closed in upon itself,” unable to connect with the world around it, and the latter for the body “existing in relation of mutual constitution with others,” it comes to

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 48.

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 52.

¹⁷⁵ Juncker, *Circling Marilyn*, 56.

understand itself through its relationship with the world.¹⁷⁶ Lastly, Frank defines self-relatedness as the body's conscious association with its own being, or its dissociation from corporeality.¹⁷⁷ Hence, people can either be the mere observers of their bodies or can be connected to them, using their bodies to realize themselves fully. These four dimensions – control, desire, relation to others and self-relatedness – thus contribute to the formation of four body types: the disciplined body, the mirroring body, the dominating body and the communicative body. These types are representations of body usage according to its response to the four dimensions in which each body type reacts differently towards the object it relates to, giving out a different style of usage.

Hence, the social roles people take on during their lives - being a parent, a child, a performer, a public person, among others – all emphasize different body dimensions and are realized through different body types. Accordingly, the bodies of Marilyn Monroe and Whitney Houston can be analyzed through Arthur W. Frank's body types, excluding the dominating body, since Frank points out it is an exclusively male body. The analysis of the two stars through their bodies can thus help in a better understanding of their split personalities and their struggles to find out who they were and who they had become under the pressure of the entertainment business. Both Monroe and Houston go back and forth between different bodies, searching for their true selves and exemplifying their dissatisfaction with the power and control exhibited by the Hollywood industry and media corporations.

THE DISCIPLINED BODY

The disciplined body, like all other body types, responds to the questions related to control, desire, relation to others and self-relatedness. In terms of control, the disciplined body “makes itself

¹⁷⁶ Frank, 52.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

predictable through its regimentation.”¹⁷⁸ The body remains predictable to itself as long as it successfully maintains the regimentation. The desire is a dimension which the disciplined body lacks. The body’s regimentation does not cure the lack, but it helps in slowing down the disintegration. Moreover, in order for the disciplined body to stay disciplined, it has to sustain the sense of lack on the conscious level and it does so by placing itself in some hierarchical order in which it is subordinated. The lack and subordination thus enter the cycle in which the lack produces the subordination, which then reproduces the lack. When it comes to other-relatedness, the disciplined body is monadic, “isolated in its own performance even if ... the body performs among others.”¹⁷⁹ The only way in which the disciplined body can relate to others is by forcing its regimen upon them; however, this would turn it into the dominating body and it would start controlling others. Finally, with regard to self-relatedness, the disciplined body dissociates from itself and distances itself from its surface. Hence, the body simultaneously disconnects itself from “any empathy with the experienced body of the other,” without the ability to neither receive nor give affection.¹⁸⁰

It is difficult to separate Marilyn Monroe from the notion of body. Her popularity was mostly created around her sensual body, and she became a symbol of what a feminine body should look like from the 1950s on. Nonetheless, when thinking about Marilyn, one cannot but also think about the different body types this star inhabited. The disciplined body is just one of the body types through which Marilyn realized herself. Although often unpredictable in her later days, the young Monroe was able to flip into the disciplined mode and keep control of her daily tasks. Carl Rollyson, the author of *Marilyn Monroe: A Life of the Actress* (2014), admires Marilyn’s work habits. As he explains, her punctuality and her preparedness for shooting sessions, alongside taking

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 55.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 56.

up lessons in makeup, posing, acting and singing, suggest her discipline.¹⁸¹ This regimentation shows the predictability and control young Norma Jeane Baker had at the beginning of her career.

Marilyn Monroe stays disciplined and in control during her acting years as well. A collection of Marilyn's poems, intimate notes and letters, edited by Stanley Buchthal, shows the disciplined Marilyn through the carefully arranged lists of the must-do tasks, from going to acting classes, to strict physical workouts.¹⁸² Her notes, regarding the dinner party she was in charge of, show a detailed plan of things Marilyn had to do. Ranging from buying cutlery and candle holders to lamps in the bedroom and "two chairs – classic – for in front of piano,"¹⁸³ the notes abound in discipline and control. Sometimes, however, this predictability and control would turn into domination, through Marilyn's behavior towards her fellow actors. Marilyn's dominating body is most visible on the set of her last and unfinished movie, *Something's Got to Give* (1962). Her constant tardiness for the scene taking, the uncertainty of whether she would show up or not, the numerous retakes of the scenes she required until she finally got into her character – all point at her controlling other people and switching into domination. Apparently, she enjoyed it. As Marilyn explains in her autobiography *My Story*, "I feel a queer satisfaction in punishing the people who are wanting me now.... The later I am the happier Norma Jeane grows."¹⁸⁴ However, this shift to the dominating body seen in Marilyn's later days also suggests the loss of control over herself. Her constant drug abuse, inability to act when she needed and, the unpredictability of whether she would show up for the scene takes or not, point at Marilyn failing the disciplined body.

¹⁸¹ Carl Edmund Rollyson, *Marilyn Monroe: A Life of the Actress* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2014), 15-16.

¹⁸² Marilyn Monroe, and Stanley Buchthal. *Fragments: Poems, Intimate Notes, Letters* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010), 138-139. iBook.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 163-164.

¹⁸⁴ Monroe with Hecht, *My Story*, 152.

Moreover, in terms of desire, Frank explains that it is its lack that is associated with the disciplined body, and Marilyn demonstrates this lack on many occasions. As Marilyn herself points out, her first marriage to Jim Dougherty had as an effect her decreased interest in sex.¹⁸⁵ When she talks about her lovers and her sexual experiences, the lack of desire is apparent. Marilyn says, “it dawned on me that people – other women – were different than me. They could feel things I couldn’t. And when I started reading books I ran into the words ‘frigid,’ ‘rejected,’ and ‘lesbian.’ I wondered if I was all three of those things.”¹⁸⁶ Furthermore, Marilyn’s subordination in the Hollywood studio system further confirms her lack of desire. Hence, we can see Marilyn in different situations in which the directors, agents and other influential people take advantage of her inferiority and sexually use her as a compensation for a job or an acting opportunity. Gloria Steinem says in *Marilyn: Norma Jeane* (1988), “[i]n return for help from agents and studio executives, she gave in sexually again. Referring to the variety of lovemaking that men who are old or powerful or fond of degrading women seem to prefer, Marilyn later confessed, ... ‘I spent a great deal of time on my knees.’”¹⁸⁷

Although often seen with people, Marilyn’s relation to others was monadic – she was isolated in her own performance. Monroe’s aloofness and lack of interest in connecting with others can often be seen in her behavior around people. Steinem explains that Monroe used to sit alone in the corner of the cafeteria and watch other actresses eat their lunch.¹⁸⁸ Furthermore, Steinem argues that Marilyn could not overcome the isolation she experienced throughout her life. Many colleagues observed Marilyn on set, “eating dinner alone, drinking alone, refusing initiations out of security.”¹⁸⁹ In addition, one of her acting coaches, Natasha Lytess, remembers that her pupil “was

¹⁸⁵ Monroe with Hecht, 29.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 93.

¹⁸⁷ Steinem, *Marilyn: Norma Jeane*, 205.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 112.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 103.

more than inhibited, more than cramped. She couldn't say a word freely."¹⁹⁰ Marilyn's insecurities, shyness and fear of abandonment contributed to her inability to relate to others. Her experience of attending Hollywood parties is usually that of boredom. As she explains, "I seldom spoke three words during dinner but would sit at Mr. Schenck's elbow and listen like a sponge."¹⁹¹ After her long days of work and fruitless attempts to find a job, young Marilyn would come back to her empty room, just as she did when she separated from her last husband, Arthur Miller. Unable to uphold her regimen or force it upon others, Marilyn stands alone among millions of people who admire her, confirming the characteristic of the disciplined body.

Similarly, Marilyn could not connect with herself. Unable to either give or receive affection, Marilyn dissociates herself from her body. She detaches herself as if to forget her experiences as a response to the humiliation and intimidation she suffers. In her biography, Marilyn often talks about herself in the third person, suggesting the dissociation with her own personality. As she describes the reason why she did not want to have a child with Jim Dougherty, Marilyn says, "I didn't quite know who it was that cried, Mrs. Dougherty or the child she might have. It was Norma Jeane."¹⁹² Interestingly, in her distancing from her body, Marilyn seemingly only distances herself from the body of Marilyn Monroe and goes back to being the lonely Norma Jeane. As if to firmly establish herself in the most inferior position in the system, she often turns to frightened and unprotected Norma Jeane Baker. She says, "I know the truth of what I'm doing. It isn't Marilyn Monroe in the tub but Norma Jean."¹⁹³ The used and ignored Miss Nobody, as Marilyn calls herself, fulfills the four dimensions that constitute the disciplined body, predictable, yet without desires, unable to connect neither with herself nor with others.

¹⁹⁰ Rollyson, 20.

¹⁹¹ Monroe with Hecht, 73.

¹⁹² Ibid., 32.

¹⁹³ Monroe with Hecht, 150.

The beginnings of Whitney Houston's career, much like those of Marilyn Monroe, were demonstrative of the disciplined body. Although perhaps not willingly, Whitney was kept on a tight rein by her mother, Cissy Houston, who guided her during her early career. Thus Whitney's behavior was very predictable, as her mother explains: "[i]f she really wanted to sing, she had to learn to do it the *right* way. That meant rehearsing every day and singing with the choir every Sunday - no exceptions."¹⁹⁴ Young Whitney's body was very disciplined. She would go to school, take upon modeling, practice singing, go to church, perform her mother's gigs. This regimen paid off, and Whitney became a true professional. Cissy Houston says of Whitney: "[s]he had been watching me in sessions and onstage for years, picking up pacing, breathing, and microphone techniques."¹⁹⁵ Narada Michael Walden similarly points out in his book *Whitney Houston: The Voice, the Music, the Inspiration* (2012) that during the song recording Whitney also had her regime: "I wanted to capture as much as possible of that incredible spirit during the two or three hours when it peaked – usually in the middle of the day, between four in the afternoon and seven in the evening –enabling her to go crazy, crazy, crazy on the vocals before then redoing specific parts."¹⁹⁶ The predictability of Whitney's early performance points to her keeping the control over her disciplined body.

Nevertheless, the more experienced Whitney at times resorted to controlling people around her, as a result turning the disciplined body to that of domination. More dependent on drugs and holding less control over her own body, Houston tried to take control of others. She would often be late for her performances or might not even show up, leaving both the organizers and her fans waiting for her. On her last tour in 2009, Whitney would often take long breaks between and in the middle of the songs. As Mark Bego describes it in his biography *Whitney Houston* (2012), "instead

¹⁹⁴ Houston, Warwick, and Dickey, *Remembering Whitney*, 77.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 113.

¹⁹⁶ Walden, *The Voice, the Music, the Inspiration*, 30.

of just singing she had adopted the habit of rambling on and on to the audience.”¹⁹⁷ Whitney was now controlling both the performance and the experience of her audience. However, the attempt to take control over others, as for all disciplined bodies, suggests her inability to control herself. In Houston’s case, her weaknesses were numerous. Her voice was no longer able to produce the high notes she was once famous for, nor was she able to control it. Her physical appearance considerably changed and instead of the young, beautiful and slim diva, her audience was now looking at a sweaty, uncoordinated and swollen shadow of her former self. Whitney Houston’s last years clearly show the toll she paid for not taking care of the disciplined body that once brought her popularity.

When it comes to desire, Whitney’s disciplined body lacked. Not much is known about Whitney’s love life before her marriage to Bobby Brown, nor has she ever emphasized her sexuality. Media often labeled her as a lesbian, an accusation which she denied, but without pointing at anyone who might have been the object of her desire. As the lack of desire, according to Frank, means putting yourself in the position of the subordinate, so did Whitney position herself as inferior in the hierarchical order, since she was victimized by institutions such as the production companies, producers and later Hollywood and marriage. As Bego points out, “[e]very aspect of her promotion was carefully planned, and it was made clear that it was Clive Davis who had the final say on all important decisions.”¹⁹⁸ Clive Davis, at the time the director of Whitney’s production company Arista Records, was obviously in a superior position, thus placing Houston lower on the hierarchical ladder.

Whitney’s popularity and her regular touring, as well as her drug addiction and personal instabilities, contributed to her loneliness. Thus in relation to others, Houston was a monadic type. As her mother Cissy Houston points out, young Whitney Houston was often bullied and alone while

¹⁹⁷ Bego, *Whitney Houston*, 198.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 49.

she attended Franklin Elementary school.¹⁹⁹ Hence, she would sometimes be excused from school due to her inability to stand up for herself, which, furthermore, contributed to her feeling of loneliness and isolation. With regard to her performance, she would also isolate herself, although her audience and band members always surrounded her. As her guitarist Corrado Rustici remembers, “Whitney was able to create those moments when music, musicians, singers, and listeners disappear, leaving only the awareness of being part of something that includes and transcends the individual.”²⁰⁰ During her drug addiction, Whitney even became detached from the closest members of her family, isolating herself in the house. Cissy Houston explains that Whitney used to lock herself up in the room without showing her face or talking to anybody for days.²⁰¹ The fact that Whitney’s dead body was found alone in the bathroom of her hotel room once more confirms the monadic dimension of the disciplined body she inhabited.

As in relation to others, Whitney’s disciplined body also could not relate to itself. Whitney often detached herself from both her private and her public image. Cissy Houston explains that there were occasions when Whitney would say, “I’m tired, it’s time for me to put Nippy to bed,” or before her performances, “Okay, it’s time for me to go be Whitney Houston.”²⁰² This dissociation was a way to distance herself from the intimidating popularity she witnessed. Moreover, at times, she dissociated herself from any empathy, disabling herself from any affection. Her mother confesses that she often wonders whether Whitney ever loved her.²⁰³ Her inability to show affection, or to accept it from people who wanted to help her in her darkest days, points at Arthur W. Frank’s notion of failure to self-relate – the fourth dimension of the disciplined body.

¹⁹⁹ Houston, *Remembering Whitney*, 70.

²⁰⁰ Walden, 37.

²⁰¹ Houston, *Remembering Whitney*, 206.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 128.

²⁰³ Frank, 275.

THE MIRRORING BODY

The mirroring body, like the disciplined one, is predictable. However, Arthur W. Frank explains that its predictability does not lie in its regimen, but in its reflection of the surroundings. It uses consumption as its medium and it becomes “as predictable as the objects made available for it.”²⁰⁴ As for desire, the mirroring body is producing it in great amounts as a way of keeping its lack unconscious. The body consumes the objects around it in order to produce desires, but the body itself does not need to be consummated. When the mirroring body sees the object it desires, it makes it a part of its image and, as Frank points out, that object becomes “a mirror in which the body sees itself reflected, but only ... on its own terms.”²⁰⁵ Concerning other-relatedness, the mirroring body is monadic. Unlike the disciplined body, however, the mirroring body is open to the world, but it remains monadic in the way it appropriates it. The mirroring body blends in with the objects around it by consuming them. However, its objects are always seen as mirroring the body and not vice versa. The mirroring body associates with itself through narcissism. The body needs to be decorated in order to exist. The mirroring body is “the body on which materials, ornaments, armor sit.... It knows no pain, for it reduces pain to a mere grimace.”²⁰⁶ It learns about itself through advertising, and this grimace can often be a sign of drug taking and not the body’s pain. However, the mirroring body does not know about its inner self and its inner organization can only be accessed by the authorized personnel.

Marilyn Monroe’s shift from the disciplined to the mirroring body did not take away her control. However, it changed the way in which she became predictable. Marilyn’s surroundings became her mirror and a means through which she expressed her predictability. The resemblance Marilyn bore with the 1920s actress Jean Harlow suggests the occurrence of Marilyn’s mirroring

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 62.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 63.

body. The image of Jean Harlow strongly influenced the creation of Marilyn Monroe. Marilyn's white look, bleached hair and exposed body are some of the characteristics both actresses possessed. Furthermore, as Lois W. Banner explains, "[L]ike Harlow, Monroe answered reporters with jokes, often wore no underwear, ... and displayed a flair for comedy."²⁰⁷ In addition to Jean Harlow, Marilyn also mirrored the looks and behavior of two other actresses who rose to fame in the 1940s, Lana Turner and Betty Grable. Marilyn, the young and aspiring actress, watched the movies where these actresses starred and picked up on their acting, making it a part of her own image.

Marilyn's need to mirror her surroundings also reflected in her marriages to the national baseball hero Joe DiMaggio and America's best playwright Arthur Miller. As she became Mrs. DiMaggio, she had to 'work out' her appearance. In her biography, Marilyn says that one of the things she had to change was "the low neckline of my dresses and suits."²⁰⁸ In order to better match her more conservative and family-oriented husband, Marilyn tried herself out with Italian dishes, went fishing with Joe's family and played cards with them. Similarly, Arthur Miller's wife learned about Judaism, because she wanted to become a part of his family and tradition.²⁰⁹ Steinem points out that Marilyn once said, "I'll cook noodles like your mother."²¹⁰ Like her third husband, Monroe became interested in the Cold War politics and theater. Carl Rollyson indicates that Marilyn used to say that her relationship with Arthur Miller was at first that of a 'pupil-teacher' – a relationship through which Marilyn was finding her identity under Arthur's guidance.²¹¹ Thus, Marilyn's insecurities and her inability to construct an identity of her own made her mirror the world around

²⁰⁷ Banner, "The Creature from the Black Lagoon," 13.

²⁰⁸ Monroe with Hecht, 176.

²⁰⁹ Steinem, 151.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ Rollyson, 136.

her. Through the consumption of the objects, Marilyn assimilates with them and makes them part of her reality. By doing this, she becomes predictable to herself and to the people around her.

Unlike the disciplined body which lacks desire, the mirroring body is producing it in great amounts. Hence, Marilyn's mirroring body produces desire as a way of keeping the body's lack on the unconscious level. Franks explains that the mirroring body's desire "is to make the object part of its image of itself."²¹² Thus Marilyn consumes the appreciation of men and her fans in order to further trigger the production of her desire. During the filming of *The Asphalt Jungle* (1950), Marilyn remembers, "[t]he biggest thrill, though, was myself. The audience whistled at me. They made 'wolf noises.' They laughed happily when I spoke.... It's a nice sensation to please the audience."²¹³ Marilyn's performance in Korea in 1954, in front of the thousands of soldiers, contributed to her production of desire. After her last performance, she told the soldiers that "they made her feel for the first time in her life completely accepted."²¹⁴ Her willingness to give autographs, take photos with the soldiers and ride "perched on top of the seat of her jeep, smiling and waving," point at Marilyn's enjoyment of herself.²¹⁵ The soldiers' appreciation of her presence and their roaring her name before the concert, helped Marilyn in constructing the image of herself.

Nevertheless, Marilyn remains monadic as she inhabits the mirroring body. As Frank suggests, the mirroring body becomes more open to the world, but it remains isolated, appropriating the world to its self-reflection. Hence, Marilyn's reality exists only in the mirror of her own body. She opens up to the world around her, chats with people, poses for the photographers, but she also keeps the distance. As Jean Negulesco, her director on *How To Marry A Millionaire* (1953), remembers, "it is difficult to come close to her. She becomes vague. She puts up a curtain between

²¹² Frank, 62.

²¹³ Monroe with Hecht, 115.

²¹⁴ Rollyson, 82.

²¹⁵ Ibid., 80.

herself and people.”²¹⁶ Furthermore, in every interaction with others, Marilyn sees herself. She cooperates with the movie producers and credits herself for their success. Monroe describes the feeling of importance as her movie brought financial success to her studio and praises herself for the achievement.²¹⁷ Her isolated nature, as a result, prevents her from seeing others and connecting with them.

In terms of self-relatedness, Marilyn exhibits narcissistic traits; nevertheless, she is also unable to connect with herself. Like every other mirroring body, Marilyn decorates her body in order to exist and she alters Norma Jeane in order to create Marilyn Monroe. The brunette girl-next-door Norma Jean thus transforms into American most popular blonde, Marilyn Monroe. Marilyn bleaches her hair, dresses provocatively, wears jewelry. She loves her body and takes care of it by exercising, taking baths, not exposing herself to too much sun and pleading to doctors not to make big scars on her body when she undergoes surgery. However, she never manages to relate to her inner self, as no other mirroring body does.

Similarly, Whitney Houston also moves from the disciplined to the mirroring body and exemplifies the four dimensions Arthur W. Frank connects to this body type. In terms of control, Whitney remains predictable, but like Marilyn, her predictability lies in her mirroring the people around her. As the late 1980s and early 1990s diva, Whitney Houston reflects her surroundings, then predominantly white, and she becomes whiter through her pop sound and the privileges she enjoyed. As a wife of the notorious Bobby Brown, a hip hop singer well-known for his troubles with the law and bad behavior, Whitney becomes a rebel of the system, breaking laws and being caught in possession of drugs. Like her troublesome husband, who was often arrested and charged for various incidents, in 2001, Whitney was caught at Hawaiian airport, carrying 15,2 grams of

²¹⁶ Ibid., 74.

²¹⁷ Monroe with Hecht, 149.

marijuana and, while she managed to escape the police, the incident resulted in her being legally ‘wanted’ in the state of Hawaii.²¹⁸ Whitney herself points out in a 2009 interview with Oprah that Bobby Brown taught her how to dance and how to move her hips.²¹⁹ Much like Marilyn, who mirrored her men and consummated them in order to make them part of her identity, Whitney was making Bobby a part of hers. This need to mirror Bobby Brown may stem from the fact that Whitney was often accused of being too white, and Brown, the ultimate bad boy from the ghetto, gave her the chance to reconnect to her black roots in which she took great pride.

Whitney even became Brown on stage. During her 1999 European tour, she allowed Brown to become the part of the show. Instead of a disciplined, beautiful and classy Whitney Houston, the audiences could see a couple who jumped up and down the stage and danced energetically – a type of dance that was one of the trademarks of Bobby’s performance.²²⁰ Seemingly, without her husband, Whitney did not know who she was. As Cissy Houston remembers, “[i]f Bobby wasn’t there, she’d walk around that big house wearing her slippers all day, ... not knowing what to do with herself.”²²¹ Thus she was predictable only when Brown was around and she could become his reflection.

Whitney produced desire through her music and performance. Her voice was a tool with which she sparked the excitement in her audience and thus consumed that excitement to enhance the production of desire. Narada Michael Walden describes the production of Whitney’s song “Just the Lonely Talking Again” as Houston metaphorically “putting on the lingerie, entering that seductive zone, and feeling as if she were barely singing.”²²² Likewise, in her song “So Emotional”

²¹⁸ Bego, 128.

²¹⁹ Man, Justin The Tv, “Whitney Houston Interview with Oprah Winfrey,” YouTube, 1:24:32, January 17, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KG42r7_2kOI&t=1641s.

²²⁰ Nick Broomfield, *Whitney: Can I Be Me*, (2017; United States, United Kingdom: Lafayette Films), Netflix.

²²¹ Houston, *Remembering Whitney*, 208.

²²² Walden, 32.

Whitney uses Stevie Wonder's growl and Michael Jackson's rhythmic exclamations, making them the objects through which she produced desire.²²³ The song starts by Whitney erotically saying "I don't know why I like ... I just do!",²²⁴ thus signaling the sensuality and great amounts of desire.

The monadic trait of the disciplined body remained as Whitney inhabited the mirroring body. While she was open to the world through her performances, interviews and photographs, Houston appropriated her relation to others according to herself – the characteristic of the mirroring body. Frequently, the press labeled Houston's behavior as 'diva-like,' and accordingly regarded her as vain and disdainful, which is indicative of the isolated body in terms of other-relatedness. An illustration of Whitney's monadic behavior happened in 1995 when she was to present at the Hollywood Palladium. Mark Bego explains that, before Whitney's arrival, it was requested that "no one was to approach 'Ms. Houston's table, at Ms. Houston's request.'"²²⁵ Even though she was omnipresent during her peak in the mid-1990s, Whitney was often described as gruff, tough and unapproachable, exemplifying the monadic element of the mirroring body.

As in relation to others, Whitney was also isolated from herself. Thus, with regard to self-relatedness, she at times demonstrated narcissistic traits and at times a complete dissociation from herself through drug consumption. In pursuit of finding her inner self, on different occasions Whitney points at the need to have some private time: "I think the public had about enough of me, and I had enough of me too."²²⁶ She would often stay at her home, trying to reconnect to her dissociated self, as she explains: "[j]ust to get to know 'me' again."²²⁷ Her drug abuse and frequent overdosing also hint at the alienation from her inner self. Whitney confessed in the interview with

²²³ Ibid., 50.

²²⁴ Whitney Houston, *So Emotional*, track 5 on *Whitney*, Arista Records, 1987, compact disc.

²²⁵ Bego, 108.

²²⁶ Ibid., 84.

²²⁷ Ibid.

Oprah that she consumed drugs due to unhappiness and the feeling that she was losing herself.²²⁸ Hence, unable to associate with others, as well as with herself, the only way for Whitney's mirroring body to exist was through its surface. Accordingly, Houston decorated it by wearing different wigs, elegant and sparkly dresses – all in an attempt to keep on being and to keep the otherwise empty body existing.

THE COMMUNICATIVE BODY

Unlike the disciplined and the mirroring body, the communicative body cannot be analyzed empirically. Nevertheless, it can be discussed through the events in which it emerges such as dance and performance. As Arthur W. Frank writes, the communicative body's quality is that "it is a body *in process* of creating itself."²²⁹ It operates within the four dimensions: control, desire, other relatedness and self-relatedness; however, in different ways from the disciplined and mirroring body. The communicative body's contingency becomes its possibility and its potential, and not a problem. While the contingency of male sexuality centers on its own desire and is thus monadic in nature, female sexuality is dyadic. Franks explains that, for women, contingency represents the potential of "another who might be: as lover or child, mother or daughter."²³⁰ The body's desire is producing and it seeks dyadic expression, unlike the monadic mirroring body. Its production is a form of expression through which the body recreates a world it partakes. In order to realize itself fully, the communicative body uses the dyadic contingency as well as the associated self-relatedness. The body uses itself to express its sorrow, joy or anger and its association with itself becomes that of realization and not of mirroring.²³¹ The communicative body, Frank explains,

²²⁸ Man, Justin The Tv, "Whitney Houston Interview with Oprah Winfrey," YouTube, 1:24:32, January 17, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KG42r7_2kOI&t=1641s.

²²⁹ Frank, 79.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, 79-80.

²³¹ *Ibid.*

produces itself within, but despite the institutions and discourses and uses them as the means of its creative expression.²³²

Marilyn Monroe creates her communicative body mostly through her sexuality. By inhabiting this body type, in terms of control, Marilyn becomes unpredictable. As Marilyn's close friend and famous novelist Norman Rosten explains in *Marilyn: An Untold Story* (1973), "anything could happen with her around, wherever it was. Explosion. No match, just her and air. Spontaneous combustion."²³³ Her sudden and unplanned trip to Korea, during her honeymoon with Joe DiMaggio, is just one example of Marilyn's unpredictable behavior. Her conception of time and her frequent lateness to the shows and on the sets furthermore point to Marilyn's unpredictability. In her autobiography, Monroe describes the process of bathing before the events so that she runs late for up to two hours. Marilyn explains: "I keep pouring perfumes into the water and letting the water run out and refilling the tub with freshwater. I forget about eight o'clock and my dinner date.... Sometimes I know the truth of what I'm doing."²³⁴ Thus, she shows her unawareness of time and even the unpredictability of her own mind and body, being only sometimes aware that she is late and that others are waiting for her.

Marilyn uses contingency as a potential to establish herself through the role of a lover, as well as a child. Unlike the mirroring and the disciplined body whose nature is monadic, Marilyn's communicative body is dyadic – she seeks the connection with others in order to express herself. Her numerous love affairs stand as the evidence of her dyadic nature and the way through which Marilyn articulates herself, confirming the existence of her communicative body. Gloria Steinem explains that through her partners, Monroe hoped to learn and gain seriousness - she looked for

²³² Ibid.

²³³ Norman Rosten, *Marilyn: An Untold Story* (New York: Signet, 1973), 17.

²³⁴ Monroe with Hecht, 150.

fathering.²³⁵ A child-like woman, Marilyn related to others in search of both a lover and a father. Through the relationships with men, she expresses the need to be nurtured and loved – she needed someone to hold onto. Steinem says that “in her [Marilyn’s] obsession for first love and first family combined, she accepted almost anything,” and, accordingly, communicated her needs through sex.²³⁶

Moreover, her relationship with children and her association with them also hints at her dyadic other-relatedness. She loved children and during her marriage to Arthur Miller badly wanted to have one. However, the painful miscarriages prevented her from achieving the dream of motherhood. The close relationship with children clearly helped Marilyn express her inner child that longed for closeness and connection with others. As Marilyn explains, “I liked boys and girls younger than me. I played games with them until my husband came out and started calling me to go to bed.”²³⁷ This behavior hints at not only her relation to children but also to her relation to men as her metaphorical fathers and nurturers. The scenes from her last, unfinished movie, *Something’s Got to Give* (1962), show Marilyn excitedly playing and giggling with the children, allowing her communicative body to express its childlike nature fully.²³⁸

Concerning self-relatedness, Marilyn expresses her world by using herself. Marilyn associates with her body that becomes a way of her realization through, for example, dance, acting, sex and drugs. Thus Marilyn’s drug consumption may signal her inner sorrow and dissatisfaction with her life in the same way as her sensuality may point at her need to be seen, recognized and loved by others. Her sometimes void and agitated behavior reflects her struggles and sadness that this lonely woman tried to communicate. *Something’s Got to Give* (1962) takes best portray

²³⁵ Steinem, 136.

²³⁶ Ibid., 139.

²³⁷ Monroe with Hecht, 30.

²³⁸ *Marilyn Monroe – The Mortal Goddess*, documentary, 1:17:48, posted 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OT2_QNh-I8w.

Marilyn's troubled world at the end of her life. On the set, she appeared nervous and often forgot her lines, in addition to being extremely distracted and unable to focus, the consequences of her drug use. It was through this behavior that the recently divorced and childless Marilyn was expressing her lonely and sad world. Moreover, prior to her death, Marilyn was allegedly calling her close friends and she was found dead in her room, holding a phone in her hand, one last time expressing her communicative nature.

Frank suggests that the communicative body also realizes itself through dance and performance. Accordingly, Marilyn's communicative body can be analyzed through her sensual walk and seductive voice and dance that accompanied it. As she remembers her trip to Korea and performance in front of the soldiers, Monroe says, "I felt worried all of a sudden about my material, not the Gershwin song but the others I was going to sing – 'Diamonds Are a Girl's Best Friend.' ... Then I remembered the dance I did after the song. It was a cute dance. I knew they would like it."²³⁹ Hence, Marilyn used dance both to relate to herself and to relate to others, embodying the dimensions Frank describes as characteristic of the communicative body.

Like Monroe, Whitney Houston inhabits the communicative body and realizes it through institutions such as motherhood and marriage, as well as through her performance. Whitney's performances regularly depicted her unpredictability in terms of her vocal possibilities, both during her peak popularity and during her decline, but differently. During the late 1980s and until the mid-1990s, Whitney's concerts abounded in magical interpretations and unexpected high notes she was able to hit, leaving the audience in awe. Her playfulness with her voice expressed Whitney's communicative body, raising the public and creating a dyadic relation between them. The contingency became Whitney's potential. Narada Michael Walden describes the process of creating a new song, while Houston was suffering from a severe bronchial infection. The sad and exhausted

²³⁹ Monroe with Hecht, 185.

singer came to the studio and recorded “For the Love of You.” As Walden explains, “[o]nce she came into the control room and heard all of her harmonies blend together, the shackles were off, a spark of happiness replaced the sadness in her eyes, and she experienced an energy high to the nth power.”²⁴⁰

Nevertheless, Whitney of the late 1990s and the early 2000s becomes unpredictable through her irregular performances, cracking voice and public outbursts, the consequences of her constant drug abuse. Her tardiness and sudden cancelations of her performances also hint at her unpredictability. Whitney’s last tour, which began in 2009, soon became the reason for apprehension. Every upcoming show carried with itself the potential for a disaster. The unpredictable Whitney, who once captured her audience with the unique voice range, now struggled to sing from the beginnings of her shows. As John Aizlewood, the critic of her London show, writes, “[w]here once she soared, now she wheezes and croaks, bludgeoning her perfect pop single ‘I Wanna Dance with Somebody (Who Loves Me)’ into karaoke submission.”²⁴¹

Moreover, her marriage to Bobby Brown raises in Whitney Houston both the unpredictability and the dyadic nature in relation to others. It is through her relationship with Bobby that Whitney’s communicative body realized itself fully. According to Whitney, Bobby allowed her to be who she really was.²⁴² This dyadic relation, furthermore, enabled Whitney to produce desire, since Bobby triggered that passion in her. “We could look at each other and just sweat,” she explains to Oprah.²⁴³ Nonetheless, during her marriage, she also became more unpredictable and not in a positive way. The once beautiful and disciplined diva started showing up in public in an appalling state, both physically and mentally. Often intoxicated, Whitney would show up “pressing

²⁴⁰ Walden, 25.

²⁴¹ Bego, 199.

²⁴² Man, Justin The Tv, “Whitney Houston Interview with Oprah Winfrey,” YouTube, 1:24:32, January 17, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KG42r7_2kOI&t=1641s.

²⁴³ Ibid.

her eyelids tightly together as though it pained her to think, wobbling slightly in her heels and wearing a glazed look in her eyes.”²⁴⁴ This behavior, nonetheless, can also be related to Whitney’s association with herself.

Whitney Houston has, much like Marilyn Monroe, used herself to associate with her world. Hence, Whitney used her voice and gospel music to strengthen her religion and relate herself to God, expressing her strong faith in Christianity, in which prayers she found a safe haven throughout her life. Through her religion, she also expressed humbleness and a sense of belonging, communicating to her audience that she was just one of them. As a mother and wife, she reflected femininity and the achievement of her potential, realizing herself in these socially important roles. However, through her drug addiction, Whitney expressed her dissatisfaction, loneliness and the inability to cope with popularity and the expectations it carried. In the interview with Oprah, Whitney confesses that she was using drugs in order to hide the pain, adding that she was unhappy and was losing herself in the period after *The Bodyguard* (1992).²⁴⁵ Her public comeback in 2009 and her openness in regard to her addiction, abusive marriage and personal struggles, hints at Whitney’s intention to reconnect with her public. In addition, her public appearances and calm and collected demeanor, show her well-being, newly found peace and readiness to express herself as a humble, happy and strong lady.

Like any other communicative body, Whitney’s body also expresses itself through performance. Contrary to Marilyn’s sensual dance that captivated the soldiers in Korea, Whitney’s first performances lacked movement, putting the accent on her voice and songs. Accordingly, Houston expressed a young, innocent and conservative woman, respecting the values her parents instilled in her. The older Whitney used her songs to express her newly found independence. After

²⁴⁴ Bego, 171.

²⁴⁵ Man, Justin The Tv, “Whitney Houston Interview with Oprah Winfrey,” YouTube, 1:24:32, January 17, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KG42r7_2kOI&t=1641s.

she ended her collaboration with the long-time mentor, Clive Davis, in 2002, Whitney released a song titled “Try It On My Own,” in which she praises her freedom. The song, which many believe is a song about her split with Clive Davis, tells a story about a woman who finally lives life the way she wants it: “I can’t go back to living through your eyes, too many lies.... I can’t go back to being someone else.... I never had a chance to do things my way, so now it’s time for me to take control.”²⁴⁶ The song ends with a loud and forceful “See I’m not afraid,” communicating to the world that she finally found herself, her purpose and the association with the world she lives in.

CELEBRITY BODIES AND POP CULTURE

In *Framing Celebrity: New Directions in Celebrity Culture* (2006), Su Holmes points out that a star is usually defined as “a potent synthesis between an incredible face and a perfect body.”²⁴⁷ Thus the star body is expected to be a fleshed perfection, which is alongside the star’s personality, regularly idealized and worshipped. Moreover, celebrity bodies are photographed, advertised and attached to certain consumer brands, with an intention to be consumed through the media by their fans. Holmes argues that “the star or celebrity body has become increasingly central to the way famous people are represented and consumed.”²⁴⁸ Besides, it serves as “the medium through which ideological messages about gender, race, class and sexuality are transmitted.”²⁴⁹ The famous body is available to all, to be adorned or scorned, worshipped or criticized, to be learned from and to help people understand the popular ideologies. The body is also involved in the construction of hegemonic notions such as masculinity and femininity, becoming a public and symbolic representative of a society.

²⁴⁶ Whitney Houston, *Try It On My Own*, track 6 on *Just Whitney*, Arista Records, 2002, compact disc.

²⁴⁷ Su Holmes and Sean Redmon. *Framing Celebrity: New Directions in Celebrity Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 290.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 292.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 296.

However, the celebrity bodies often become objects of consumption not only in their professional but also in their private life. Hence, their authentic selves are revealed to the public, either purposefully or due to tabloids and magazines. As a result, Holmes explains that, “the real person ‘behind’ the fabricated personality is increasingly revealed to fans.... [putting] the famous person under the discursive control of fans.”²⁵⁰ Thus professional image and private life intertwine and create an everyday spectacle for the fans, stripping off the celebrities of any privacy and possibility to either enjoy their lives or cope with their struggles. Both their personal traits and their bodies are exploited by the production companies and the media, with an intention to be consumed by their fans, creating the circle between the three. However, this circle, while inevitably satisfying the two participants, leaves the third one – the stars - in the position of extreme pressure of maintaining both their personal and professional image. The invention of superstars, alongside the rise of the pop culture and mass media, put the stars in the spotlight they can never get out from. Thus, they become the objects that are frequently ferociously exploited, while their emotional state is wholly disregarded. Seemingly, the stars belong to everybody, but themselves.

The three body types (communicative, disciplined and mirroring), defined by Arthur W. Frank, show different aspects of human personality and behavior, but can also suggest personal struggles and distresses to realize oneself fully and be truly authentic to him or herself. Accordingly, the examples of Marilyn Monroe and Whitney Houston show the split personalities that lay in these two superstars. Under the constant watchful eye of their employers, media, fans and families, and simultaneously trying to keep their careers going, while suffering from addiction, Marilyn and Whitney are stereotypical examples of the exploited stars. The bodies they inhabit throughout their prematurely ended lives confirm their attempts to be everybody’s and be their own.

²⁵⁰ Ibid., 485.

Hence, their disciplined bodies suggest control over themselves. Always on top of tasks, always perfect, they represent the much-idealized image of a celebrity. However, as the pressures of business became stronger and their fans hungrier, their addiction got worse, and with it, the two stars started losing control over themselves and tried to control and dominate others. As mirroring bodies, Marilyn and Whitney demonstrate the effort to relate to something and exist through someone else's image, which suggests the loss of their personalities. The distressed divas use their communicative bodies as an attempt to reconnect with their fans and with themselves. They open up about their pains and struggles and reveal themselves to the world. Devils and saints, princesses and drug addicts, America's biggest divas and America's biggest letdowns, praised and criticized, these two women ostensibly were not even given a chance to save themselves.

CHAPTER IV – DISRUPTING HEGEMONY

HEGEMONY AND POP CULTURE

The contribution of popular culture in creating the prevalent ideologies in a society has been a topic of many cultural theorists. Thus, it is important to understand what popular culture is and how it influences the masses it reaches. In his book, *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture* (2012), John Storey suggests different definitions of popular culture. However, in this chapter I will focus on two of them only, since they are most appropriate for the subject matter that will be discussed. Firstly, Storey defines popular culture as “mass-produced commercial culture.”²⁵¹ In other words, popular culture is produced for masses to consume it. An impoverished and imposed culture, as Storey defines it, popular culture, together with the mass culture, is an original American product.²⁵² It is a tool with which the USA manages capitalism and triggers consumption. With regard to capitalism, the second definition of popular culture is imposed - the definition of hegemony. I have briefly discussed the notion of hegemony in the first chapter of this thesis; nevertheless, this chapter will go more in depth in analyzing it, by suggesting that Marilyn Monroe and Whitney Houston represent a group that challenges this ideology.

Hegemony is defined as a way in which “dominant groups in society, through a process of ‘intellectual and moral leadership,’ seek to win the consent of subordinate groups in society.”²⁵³ However, many theorists question that hegemony is dominated solely by powerful groups, and argue that it represents the negotiations between those in power and subordinate groups. Thus, many cultural theorists have used this approach in defining the prevalent notions of popular culture, suggesting that it represents a battlefield between ‘resistance’ and ‘incorporation.’ On the one hand, popular culture deals with resisting subordinate groups and, on the other, it deals with the forces of

²⁵¹ Storey, *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture*, 6.

²⁵² *Ibid.*, 8.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, 10.

dominant groups, which try to incorporate their interests into the culture. In his work “Reconsidering Resistance and Incorporation,” Richard Butusch explains that there is no winner in this battle. As he writes, “while commodity culture is powerful, the victory is never total, and people regularly resist the domination that is so feared.”²⁵⁴ Instead of a winner, there is a ‘compromise equilibrium,’ which represents a balance between the two parties; however, this balance usually tips towards those in power.²⁵⁵ Storey points out that compromise equilibrium can be used as a way through which various conflicts within popular culture may be analyzed. Moreover, he explains that the hegemony theory may be used to “explore and explain conflicts involving ethnicity, ‘race’, gender, generation, sexuality, disability, etc.,” which represent the aspects of cultural struggle in different time periods against the “homogenizing forces of incorporation of the official or dominant culture.”²⁵⁶ As a result, Butusch adds that the subordinate groups are “contended against cultural institutions and elites,” at the same time reconstructing commodities with an intention of creating their own subculture.²⁵⁷

Furthermore, hegemony theory provides us with the understanding that popular culture is what people “make from their active consumption of the texts and practices of the culture industries.”²⁵⁸ In other words, people appropriate the commodities that have been commercially provided to them and appropriate them to their own needs. Thus hegemony theory allows us to understand popular culture as “a ‘negotiated’ mix of what is made both from ‘above’ and from ‘below’, both ‘commercial’ and authentic’; a shifting balance of forces between resistance and

²⁵⁴ Richard Butusch, “Reconsidering Resistance and Incorporation,” in *Gender, Race, and Class in Media: A Critical Reader*, eds. Gail Dines, Jean McMahon Humez, Bill Yousman, and Lori Bindig (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2018), 88.

²⁵⁵ Storey, 10.

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

²⁵⁷ Butusch, 88.

²⁵⁸ Storey, 84.

incorporation.”²⁵⁹ Hence, in order not to be defeated by resistance, hegemonic structures have to be continuously reformed and remodified, since they are constantly challenged by the subordinate groups.²⁶⁰ It is through these two aspects, incorporation and resistance, that I will discuss the examples of Marilyn Monroe and Whitney Houston as representatives of the subordinate groups that have challenged the notions of hegemony in terms of gender and race.

HEGEMONY AND GENDER

Women’s oppression has long been an issue in American society. In *Gender & Pop Culture: A Text-Reader* (2014), Patricia Leavy and Adrienne Trier-Bieniek explain that gender differences have been established as social constructs in order to differentiate between the male and female sex and to attribute to them the accepted ideals of masculinity and femininity.²⁶¹ In addition, gender has been used as a means for securing masculine power, which has resulted in female oppression. As a result, feminism emerged, with an intention to define and fight this oppression. In regard to reasons for oppression, sociologist Sylvia Walby posits three, which John Storey explains in *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture* (2012). Firstly, women’s oppression is a result of the patriarchal system, “a system of domination in which men as a group have power over women as a group.”²⁶² Secondly, it is a result of capitalism; men dominate women due to the “capital’s domination over labor.”²⁶³ Thirdly, the reason for oppression is defined as a result of “male prejudice against women, embodied in law or expressed in the exclusion of women from particular areas of life.”²⁶⁴

Hence, media and pop culture, due to their ability to reach the masses, have always been useful tools through which the prevalent ideologies of a certain time period have been presented.

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

²⁶⁰ Butsch, 89-90.

²⁶¹ Leavy and Trier-Bieniek, *Gender & Pop Culture: A Text-Reader*, 2.

²⁶² Storey, 137.

²⁶³ Ibid.

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

Serving as leading agents of socialization, media and pop culture help people learn society's values and norms.²⁶⁵ In this fashion, the representation of gender in movies and media also falls subject to a stereotypical and overgeneralized portrayal, which helps in confirming prevalent ideologies. As Leavy and Trier-Bieniek explain, female characters in movies are usually portrayed as "obsessed with their romantic relationships and can even appear 'psycho' as they try to land a man."²⁶⁶ Marilyn Monroe can serve as an obvious example of stereotyping, since most of her roles presented her as a vulnerable, dumb blonde, seducing men in pursuit of their love and money.

Nevertheless, Marilyn can also be seen as belonging to the subordinate group that resisted and challenged the common ideology by refusing to accept a low salary, shallow roles of a dumb blonde and by requesting more dramatic roles in which she could actually show her acting capability. Lois W. Banner explains that Marilyn's dissatisfaction was a product of "the hegemonic masculine studio system that had used her, limiting her salary while they made millions from her films."²⁶⁷ In her autobiography, Marilyn remembers the conversation with her acting coach, actor Michael Chekhov, in which Chekhov told her that her studio bosses were only interested in her sexuality. In Chekhov's words, "all they want of you is to make money out of you by photographing your erotic vibrations."²⁶⁸ Obviously, he explained to her the capitalist and consumerism ideologies in Hollywood. Marilyn resisted: "I want to be an artist, ... not an erotic freak. I don't want to be sold to the public as a celluloid aphrodisiac [*sic*]... I realized that just as I had once fought to get into the movies and become an actress, I would now have to fight to become myself and to be able to use my talents. If I didn't fight, I would become a piece of merchandise to be sold off the movie pushcart."²⁶⁹ Moreover, in order not to be exploited by Hollywood, Marilyn

²⁶⁵ Leavy, 13.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.

²⁶⁷ Banner, "The Creature from the Black Lagoon," 21.

²⁶⁸ Monroe with Hecht, *My Story*, 173.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 174.

formed her own production company in an attempt to express her independence and resistance to the powerful hegemonic system.

In a society such as the US, in which, according to statistic records from 2011, media culture is dominated by men, Marilyn can be seen as one of the pioneers fighting female oppression.²⁷⁰ Marilyn's efforts to become a successful company owner and her fight to be regarded as a more serious actress and not just a dumb blonde hint at her breaking new paths for women in business. With 97% of men taking up all of the powerful positions in media, Marilyn's company undoubtedly signaled resistance and a need for a change.²⁷¹ Her confrontation with the system was unexpected, but successful. As photographer Philippe Halsman explains, "I saw the amazing phenomenon of Hollywood being outsmarted by a girl whom it itself characterized as a dumb blonde."²⁷²

Moreover, the feminist movement which, for the second time, started in the early 1960s, was closely connected to Gloria Steinem, who is the author of the Marilyn biography *Marilyn: Norma Jeane* (1988). Steinem's article about the exploitation of the "Playboy Bunnies" brought national attention and was very influential in the fight for women's rights.²⁷³ Interestingly, Marilyn Monroe posed for the first cover of the Playboy magazine in 1953. Thus, Marilyn's life perhaps served as an inspiration to Steinem and her fight against female oppression. The 1960s and the 1970s feminist movement focused on both middle- and upper-class women, who sought to fight oppression and to change the common conception of women as solely housewives and mothers. As a result, numerous laws were passed, including those which "protected abused or harassed women, brought sexual liberation in the form of the birth control pill, advanced the number of women seeking public office and/or graduate degrees."²⁷⁴ In this respect, Marilyn can also be regarded as

²⁷⁰ Leavy, 15.

²⁷¹ Ibid.

²⁷² Eve Arnold, *Marilyn Monroe: An Appreciation* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987), 22.

²⁷³ Leavy, 7.

²⁷⁴ Ibid., 8.

an inspiration, who, through her personal sufferings and subordination, publicly known sexual abuses, numerous abortions and later inability to have children, helped women in realizing their position and helped them to stand up for their rights.

Parallel with the rise of Whitney Houston in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the third wave of feminism occurred. During the 1980s, women's bodies were often a topic in the popular press, which suggested that "[t]heir 'biological clocks' became a concern as they continued delaying marriage and pregnancy to focus on their careers."²⁷⁵ Although this was not the main focus on the feminist agenda, it clearly shows the position and expectations of women, requiring from them the old-traditional domestic lifestyle. The feminist agenda, however, mainly focused on increasing the representation of international women and women of color and "the use of popular culture and technology in feminist activism."²⁷⁶ Leavy and Trier-Bieniek point out that one of the focuses of third-wave feminism was using the concept of privilege to include the experiences of colored women. Accordingly, Whitney serves as an example of a woman who managed to earn the utmost respect and privilege in the mostly male-dominated entertainment business. Successfully resisting the prevailing ideology of the 1980s and 1990s, Whitney married at twenty-nine, realized herself as a mother at the age of thirty, and managed to have a successful career at the same time. Moreover, her career, economic stability, numerous awards and dozens of number one hits and albums secured her a position among the privileged. She proved that it is possible to be both black and a woman and be successful, and she helped in clearing the space for black female artists such as Beyoncé, Rihanna and Alicia Keys.

In addition, following in Marilyn's footsteps, Whitney also formed her own management company, Nippy Inc., as well as the Whitney Houston Children's Foundation, and tried herself out

²⁷⁵ Ryan Maureen, "Entertaining Fantasies: Lifestyle and Social Life in 1980s America," *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 39, no. 1 (2015): 95.

²⁷⁶ Ibid.

as a businesswoman. Furthermore, during the 1980s she donated money and built Houston Estates.²⁷⁷ In appreciation of her charity work, Whitney was honored by George Bush “for her community action and elected to a Board of Governors,” as well as by media organization VH1.²⁷⁸ Her successful movie career and her role in *Waiting to Exhale* (1995) helped in improving the portrayal of African American women, who were usually stereotypically presented as “drug-starved prostitutes or corpulent maids.”²⁷⁹ Still regarded as the best rendition of “The Star Spangled Banner,” Whitney’s Super Bowl performance in 1991, put her in a position that strongly supports the feminist wave of that period. A woman of color, representing the whole nation and uplifting the people in turbulent times was obviously beneficial for the feminist movement and supported its main agenda, that of including the women of color in the fight against oppression.

HEGEMONY AND RACE

In the second chapter of this thesis, I discuss the main notions of whiteness, namely Christianity, race and enterprise and imperialism, proposed by Richard Dyer in *White* (1997), and analyze to what extent Marilyn Monroe and Whitney Houston fulfill and deviate from these concepts. However, in this chapter, I will discuss race as a social construct, which supports hegemonic power structures. Both Monroe and Houston challenge this ideology and serve as examples of the resistance group in the ‘resistance’/ ‘incorporation’ binary. They supported and helped the inclusion of people of color in popular culture.

Many critics have argued that skin color is merely a biological characteristic of humans, while it is people’s construction of stereotypes surrounding different skin colors that give meaning

²⁷⁷ Camera Obscura: “Whitney Is Every Woman?: Cultural Politics And The Pop Star,” accessed March 31, 2019, <http://www.classicwhitney.com/interview/cameraobscura1995.htm>.

²⁷⁸ Ibid.

²⁷⁹ Ibid.

to 'race.' As John Storey explains, race is "a cultural and historical category, a way of making *difference* signify between people of a variety of skin tones."²⁸⁰ Lynn S. Chancer supports this argument in *Gender, Race, and Class: An Overview* (2006) and adds that race has often been used in socially constructed settings in order to stress "biases and differences on the basis of skin color." She adds that, in the West, a lighter skin tone has been given the superior position over the darker ones.²⁸¹ Hence, it is not the skin color or any other biological differences that give meanings; rather, what they come to signify is a result of politics and power.²⁸² In addition, as Paul Gilroy explains in *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack* (2002), "'Race' has to be socially and politically constructed and elaborate ideological work is done to secure and maintain the different forms of 'racialization.'"²⁸³ As whites have managed to position themselves outside of the notions of race and are thus regarded as solely belonging to human race, Storey argues that any further discussions of race and ethnicity "contribute to the power and privilege of whiteness."²⁸⁴

In his essay "The Whites of Their Eyes: Racist Ideologies and the Media," Stuart Hall explains the importance of the media and how the media is used to construct the definitions of race, helping in presenting "what meaning the imagery of race carries, and what the 'problem of race' is understood to be."²⁸⁵ Furthermore, he adds, media does not only produce the ideas, but also articulates them.²⁸⁶ Hence, the disparity in portrayal of white and black people, and especially women on screen, is a common occurrence. Historically, apart from the uneven inclusion of black

²⁸⁰ Storey, 171.

²⁸¹ Lynn S. Chancer and Beverly Xaviera Watkins, *Gender, Race, and Class: An Overview* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 50.

²⁸² Storey, 172.

²⁸³ Paul Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack* (London: Routledge Classics, 2002), 35.

²⁸⁴ Storey, 184.

²⁸⁵ Stuart Hall, "The Whites of Their Eyes: Racist Ideologies and the Media," in *Gender, Race, and Class in Media: A Critical Reader*, eds. Gail Dines, Jean McMahon Humez, Bill Yousman, and Lori Bindig (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2018), 105.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

women in popular culture, their representation was often reduced to stereotypical roles such as “the domestic Mammy, hypersexual Jezebel, or the overly aggressive Sapphire.”²⁸⁷ Although to a lesser degree and in a more sophisticated manner, these representations still stand in contemporary media representations. With regard to issues of inequality, the need for reinstating the ideas surrounding race have emerged, one of which is to recognize whiteness as just another ethnicity and not the superior ‘race.’ Thus Marilyn Monroe and Whitney Houston’s use of media and popular culture can be analyzed as an effort to resist the prevalent ideology of race, which, furthermore helped in increasing the number of African Americans on the scene.

Marilyn Monroe’s whiteness has often been a subject of racial discussion among scholars. Whether her whiteness was constructed to support the hegemony of white, or was solely made to attract the audiences remains an issue. However, it is obvious that, in a number of situations, Marilyn used her privileged position in society to help people of color and thus symbolizes the resistance of the subordinate group. Monroe’s identification with the minority groups is widely known. Perhaps due to her struggles during her childhood, she could more easily relate to the working class and oppressed people, who suffered from the system. Similarly, she got a large fandom of African Americans, who loved the blonde diva. Moreover, Lois W. Banner points out that Monroe claimed to have had an affair with a black man, which, put in the perspective of the 1950s, not only shows courage, but also challenges the conceptions of that time.²⁸⁸ Considering the fact that the first interracial marriage, the famous court case *Loving v. Virginia*, was legally accepted in 1967, Monroe’s claim shows the support of the people of color and helps in breaking stereotypes.²⁸⁹

²⁸⁷ Alexa A. Harris and Adria Y. Goldman, “Black Women in Popular Cultrue,” in *Black Women and Popular Culture: The Conversation Continues*, edited by Goldman, Adria Y., et al. (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2014): 7, accessed May 17, 2019, ProQuest Ebook Central.

²⁸⁸ Banner, 15.

²⁸⁹ *Loving v. Virginia*, 388 U.S. 1 (1967).

Her friendship with the African American jazz singer Ella Fitzgerald, points at her activity within the subordinate group. An article from *The Independent*, titled “Marilyn and Ella: The Meeting of the Misfits,” explains the circumstances under which the two stars met. In 1955, Monroe decided to take a break from Hollywood and moved to New York, where she found out about Fitzgerald’s music in whose music “Monroe recognized the creative genius she herself longed to possess.”²⁹⁰ Thus, when Monroe discovered that Ella Fitzgerald was not allowed to play in the nightclub Mocambo due to her skin color, she used her popularity, and possibly her privilege as a white woman, to ensure with the club manager that if he let Fitzgerald perform, she would be in the front row every night.²⁹¹ It is because of Monroe’s intervention that Fitzgerald became a famous and recognized jazz singer, who never again had to perform only in the clubs that were ‘color-blind.’ Perhaps on the smaller scale, this example still shows Monroe’s resistance towards the hegemony of white and her support of the black people with whom she felt more at home, as a disadvantaged, oppressed member of a group.

Unlike Marilyn Monroe, Whitney Houston never had to identify herself with subordinate groups, since by birth she belonged to one. Hence, her enormous success and public acceptance undoubtedly helped in inclusion of African Americans and helped increase their more positive representation in the media. Houston’s music - although often labeled as ‘too white,’ and due to which she was accused of selling out her black roots - can also be seen as her attempt to reconcile the differences between black and white and help in incorporating the characteristic black sound into the largely dominated white pop genre. Japp Kooijman explains in “The True Voice of Whitney Houston: Commodification, Authenticity, and African American Superstardom” that the

²⁹⁰ “Marilyn and Ella: The Meeting of the Misfits,” *The Independent*, February 13, 2008, <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/theatre-dance/features/marilyn-and-ella-the-meeting-of-the-misfits-781442.html>

²⁹¹ Ibid.

gospel quality of her voice implies that “instead of her becoming more ‘white’ because she sings pop, Houston is adding authentic ‘blackness’ to the pop songs she is singing.”²⁹² Hence, Kooijman adds, Houston’s style calls for “the reconsideration of race-based categories,” and “challenges the underlying distinction between ‘blackness’ and ‘whiteness.’”²⁹³ Moreover, on Houston’s insistence, her fourth album titled *My Love Is Your Love* (1998) abounds in a ‘black’ sound and has more hip hop characteristics, which distinguishes it from her previous recordings. Mark Bego describes this album as an experiment in which Houston’s singing was “much more sassy and assertive, and it was actually quite a successful excursion to hip hop.”²⁹⁴ Although the album got mixed reactions from her audience, it is a sign of resistance and an attempt to fight the common perception of black music.

Furthermore, Whitney Houston’s movie career also challenged the prevalent ideologies and helped in improving the overall image of African Americans during the 1990s. Her first movie role in *The Bodyguard* (1992) portrays Houston as a successful singer, Rachel Marron, who hires a bodyguard Frank Farmer (Kevin Costner), to protect her from a hired assassin.²⁹⁵ Rachel, a black woman, is rich, privileged, beautiful and extremely popular, much like real-life Whitney Houston. As bell hooks points out in her book *Outlaw Culture: Resisting Representations* (1994), Rachel hires a white bodyguard, which points at the role reversal, a black woman now hiring a white man to serve her.²⁹⁶ Furthermore, Rachel and Frank fall in love and embark on an interracial relationship, which addresses the issue of interracial marriages. hooks explains that *The Bodyguard*

²⁹² Kooijman, “The True Voice of Whitney Houston,” 309.

²⁹³ Ibid.

²⁹⁴ Bego, *Whitney Houston*, 123.

²⁹⁵ Mick Jackson, *The Bodyguard*, (United States: Warner Bros., 1992), DVD.

²⁹⁶ bell hooks, *Outlaw Culture: Resisting Representations* (London: Routledge, 1994), 71.

serves as an example that “producers, directors, and stars can use their power to make progressive changes in the area of representation.”²⁹⁷

Houston’s roles in *The Preacher’s Wife* (1996) and *Cinderella* (1997) also suggest her attempt to increase the black representation on screen. Done as a remake of *The Bishop’s Wife* (1947), *The Preacher’s Wife* brings Houston back to her gospel roots and church setting, emphasizing her African American background.²⁹⁸ Interestingly, while *The Bishop’s Wife* cast only white actors, its remake cast prominent black actors such as Denzel Washington. The positive reviews the movie received, one of which states that “[t]ransferring the action to a black church where Houston regularly sings gospel music is the update’s most major improvement on the original,”²⁹⁹ suggest the acceptance among the public and gives hope that the inclusion of subordinate groups is actually possible. For the role in the movie, Houston was rewarded with her first acting award for Outstanding Actor/Actress, at the NAACP (The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) Image Awards.³⁰⁰ Seemingly, her contribution to the subordinate group was recognized and appreciated. Houston’s role as a fairy godmother in the television movie *Cinderella*, which also consisted of an all-black cast, although not her best role, inevitably posits the idea that African Americans can also be a part of a fairy tale.³⁰¹ To an extent, the movie bridges the gap between the expected story of a white Princess and her Prince Charming and the excluded blacks, giving them hope that they can become a part of the narrative and change the prevalent conceptions and their exclusion from society.

²⁹⁷ Ibid., 72.

²⁹⁸ Penny Marshall, *The Preacher’s Wife*, (United States: Touchstone Pictures and The Samuel Goldwyn Company, 1996), DVD.

²⁹⁹ Bego, 115.

³⁰⁰ Ibid., 117.

³⁰¹ Rodgers & Hammerstein's *Cinderella*, video file, 1:28: 06, YouTube, posted 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fk9uuD86ufk&t=2415s>.

Nowadays, the issues of hegemony still remain unresolved. Gender and racial equality are perhaps now more than ever being questioned and movements such as “Me Too” and “Black Lives Matter,” which focus on the improvement of women’s and African American’s position in society, stand as reminders that action has to be taken to finally resolve and diminish social differences. Richard Butsch explains that hegemony is “active and adjusting,” and that there is a space “sometimes more, sometimes less, for ‘other senses of reality,’ alternative or oppositional.”³⁰² The inclusion of hip hop in the 1990s serves as an example of the successful resistance of African Americans and society’s acceptance of the new musical genre. Thus, Marilyn Monroe and Whitney Houston exemplify the attempts to help subordinate groups to be heard and accepted in the society. Although, perhaps, not openly speaking about the gender and race issues and being radically present in the oppositional groups, they inevitably contributed to paving the way to the current situation, where more and more people stand up for their rights and fight against inequality.

³⁰² Butsch, 90.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Marilyn Monroe's and Whitney Houston's fame showed to be a construction of the consumerist society and powerful institutions such as the production companies and the media. Their position in society and their struggle to remain under the limelight, but at the same time remain true to themselves, has strongly been influenced by the prevailing ideologies regarding gender and race. Both Monroe and Houston, under the pressure of society - including the media corporations, audiences, production companies - sought to maintain their perfect star images; however, for both of the stars, those attempts led to drug addiction, public ridicule, personality loss and finally to their early deaths.

Marilyn and Whitney both came to be the representatives of the decades they became most prominent - the 1950s and the late 1980s and 1990s. Gender issues, more specifically, female oppression and male superiority are identified in Marilyn's and Whitney's relations with their employers, in their marriages, and their position in American society. Both of the stars fell prey to the powerful movie and music industries, obeying the rules of the hegemonic system. Their star image was primarily a construction of their employers, who created them following the hegemonic and consumerist ideologies of their time, making Marilyn and Whitney valuable commodities, and disregarding their personal needs and well-being.

Marilyn became America's biggest bombshell and the most famous blonde, a perfect example of post-war Hollywood, where sexuality became an substantial aspect in the movies. Furthermore, by presenting her as a sensual, yet innocent child-like woman, the media turned Marilyn into an object that men could admire and consume, but who did not endanger the notion of masculinity. Similarly, America's sweetheart Whitney Houston was shaped into a feminine pop icon. Separated from her black roots and gospel and R&B music in order to appeal more to the white audiences, Whitney became a 'symbolic mulatto' of the pop scene, a woman who captivated

the masses with her voice but never threatened either concept of masculinity or concept of whiteness.

Additionally, examples of Monroe and Houston suggest that women have unsuccessfully been struggling to meet the expectations of society by which they would reach the white ideal – a concept historically constructed by white men. While Marilyn’s image abounded in whiteness, starting from her hair, to her skin and her clothes, as well as her fulfillment of the criteria required by the ideology, suggested by Richard Dyer – Christianity, ‘race’ and colonialism – Marilyn could never be the ideal representative of white. Her conversion to Judaism, her emphasized sexuality and her frequent identification with subordinate groups such as the working class and people of color, contributed to her distancing from achieving the ideal. More importantly, her femininity prevented her from ever entering the space reserved for the superior white men. Marilyn’s attempts to become the ideal example of white resulted in her stretching the whiteness to the extent of disappearing.

Whitney, on the other hand, managed to, hypothetically, enter the world of whiteness and enjoy the privileges of the white people, through her fulfillment of the white criteria. A devoted Christian, a woman loved by her white audiences and a symbol of America, who gave the people hope in the time of national crisis, seemed to have achieved the ideal of whiteness. However, her drug abuse, rumors about her sexuality, marriage to a black boy from the ghetto Bobby Brown, and her numerous public scandals, made an already rocky foundation crumble like a house of cards, revealing Whitney’s black sides and distancing her from ever again reaching the privileged world of whites. Her unfruitful attempt to come back and prove to people that white Whitney everybody used to adore was still there, seemingly only sped up the process of her downfall, unfortunately ending in Whitney being ultimately absorbed by her darkness.

The pressures the two stars suffered from during their careers proved to be unendurable. Unyielding expectations from the production companies and their audience to always be at their top

performance and never disappoint the public, for Marilyn and Whitney was exhausting. The effort they put into maintaining their star images led to their personal dissatisfaction and the feeling of loneliness. The fact that these two stars lost their personalities is seen through different body types they inhabited at different stages in their lives, all in the attempt to find out who they are. Often contradictory in the ways they fulfill the tasks, the disciplined, the mirroring, and the communicative body types that Arthur W. Frank suggests, point at Marilyn's and Whitney's struggles to both relate to others and relate to themselves. Their struggles are made even harder to cope with due to the need to meet the expectations required from them as employees of the leading multimedia corporations, as public persons, businesswomen, wives and mothers. By being manufactured into profitable products in a consumerist society, both Marilyn and Whitney at the public's disposal to use them and shape both their public and private images according to their needs. And, while the two stars belonged to everybody, they were eventually robbed from the privilege to belong to themselves.

Nonetheless, although Marilyn and Whitney exemplify gender and racial inequality and the examples from their lives and careers point at them being in the subordinate position in society, the two stars also stand as heroines of the twentieth century. Living in a hegemonic society, in which the powerful and dominant groups shape the ideologies by which subordinate groups have to abide, Marilyn and Whitney demonstrate resistance. In a society where gender and racial ideologies are mainly constructed to serve white men and protect notions of masculinity, the two stars set an example that the inclusion of marginalized groups in a society is possible without any radical repercussions for the existing order. On the contrary, their resistance and, although on a small scale, still successful inclusion of women and African Americans on the public scene, to an extent helped in diminishing the inequalities, which consequently led to the decreased resistance of the

subordinate groups – the reason why superior groups feel threatened, to begin with. However, the issues are still far from resolved.

The lives of Marilyn Monroe and Whitney Houston should stand as a reminder of where society used to be and where it is now. These two stars shone bright and lit the way to generations to come. Their light showed the direction to which the society should go – the inclusion of subordinate groups and unity regardless of our color, gender and class. Marilyn and Whitney can be seen as the exemplars who, during the feminist movements, helped in the inclusion of women and, during the rise of multiculturalism, showed that society was big enough for everybody to take part in, without necessarily threatening the existence of the other. As every star that shines too bright, these two went out too soon; however, their legacy to the world is still here to guide us.

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