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# Global femininities: India, Bollywood Actresses and postfeminism

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# Global Femininities: India, Bollywood Actresses and Postfeminism

By

**Viraj Suparsad**

**A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Media Studies**




**University of the Witwatersrand**

**Johannesburg**

**May 2019**

# Global Femininities: India, Bollywood Actresses and Postfeminism

**A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Media Studies**


**Department of Media Studies**
**Faculty of Humanities**
**University of the Witwatersrand**

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May 2019


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**Declaration**

I declare that this thesis is my own original unaided work and it has not been previously submitted for a degree or diploma at any other university. Where other people's works have been used, this has been fully acknowledged. This thesis is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Faculty of Humanities at the University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa.

Signed

_____V.S_____

Viraj Suparsad
364120
May 2019

**Dedication**

For my parents, the first feminists I know.

## Acknowledgements

There are a few people I would like to acknowledge. First, to my mom, Vidhu Vedalankar. Ma, you taught me feminism even when I was too young to understand what it was. You are the feminist icon in my life and I will always be grateful for the ways in which you and dad raised me in a gender equal household and encouraged me to ask why. Asking why made me recognise injustice and inequality in this world and this continues to inspire the work that I do today. Through this PhD, you supported me even when some of the decisions I made appeared crazy. You were a sounding board for ideas and even if we didn't always agree in those discussions, know that I recognise how lucky I am to have someone in my corner. We have overcome a lot together and I think our strength lies in the way in which we rally behind each other while also giving the each other room to soar. Knowing that I could count on you and your support and encouragement mattered and continues to matter to me. Through this support, I have been able to soar in ways that I didn't always believe I could.

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## Abstract

This project looks at existing theoretical work on postfeminism and femininities, specifically with the intention of locating such theoretical discourses outside of western constructions and frameworks. As a result of much of the current work on this topic tending to theorise experience in the western world, this thesis critically examines Indian mainstream popular media content about Bollywood and the women who occupy that space to properly understand the ways in which gender manifests in that context. Using existing theoretical discussions from postfeminism, celebrity culture, affect and femininities, this project considers how gender is constructed and disseminated to audiences via media content about Bollywood actresses.

The analytical discussions of the project form three key chapters all of which are organised in a dual thematic approach. Each chapter has an overarching theme that is applicable to the chapter in its entirety. These overarching themes are (i) femininity and work, (ii) bodily femininity and (iii) femininity and love. Through these themes one is able to get a multifaceted sense of idealised femininity relating to key areas of gender performance as identified by the mainstream media considered. However, within each of these thematic chapters, analysis is then further organised in relation to content about young women, wives and mothers. This links to the influence drawn from the work of Angela McRobbie (2003 originally published in 1978) that asserts that the media categorize the lives of women disseminating varied yet specific content to women within these different categories as part of properly micromanaging ideal gender performance that is taught via media content as a whole. As a result, in drawing from these findings of McRobbie but moving away from western examples, the project presents the nuance of contemporary urban Indian femininity(ies) in great detail. This is done via considering how it manifests as a whole while also tracking its progression and shifts as women move along the idealised hegemonic trajectory from youth to wifehood to motherhood.

## Table of Contents

Acknowledgements ..... v
Abstract ..... vii
Table of Contents ..... 8
List of Appendices ..... 10
List of Tables ..... 11
List of Figures ..... 11
Chapter 1: Introduction ..... 12
1.1 Introduction to the study ..... 12
1.2 Aims ..... 22
1.3 Research questions ..... 22
1.4 Methodology ..... 22
1.5 Research design ..... 23
1.6 Data selection ..... 24
1.7 Data collection ..... 29
1.8 Data analysis ..... 32
Chapter 2: Theoretical Discussions ..... 37
2.1 Postfeminism ..... 37
2.2 Feminism ..... 41
2.3 A more global postfeminism ..... 45
2.4 The Indian context ..... 48
2.5 Gender and affect ..... 60
2.6 Celebrity culture and Bollywood ..... 62
Chapter 3: Contextualising Indian Femininity(ies) ..... 68
3.1 The weddings ..... 69
3.2 Post the weddings ..... 76
Chapter 4: Femininity and Work ..... 85
4.1 Femininity and Work ..... 85
4.1.1 The work of femininity ..... 85
4.2 Young women ..... 92
4.2.1 Professional work ..... 93
4.2.2 Everyday work ..... 96
4.2.3 Vocal work ..... 101

4.3 Wives ..... 108
4.3.1 Working after marriage ..... 108
4.4 Mothers ..... 110
4.4.1 Balance ..... 110
4.5 Conclusion ..... 115
Chapter 5: Bodily Femininity ..... 117
5.1 Bodily femininity ..... 117
5.2 Young women ..... 122
5.2.1 The feminine body ..... 122
5.2.2 Styled perfection ..... 125
5.3 Wife ..... 135
5.3.1 A more traditional bodily femininity ..... 136
5.4 Mother ..... 140
5.4.1 The feminine body ..... 141
5.4.2 Embracing motherhood ..... 143
5.5 Conclusion ..... 147
Chapter 6: Femininity and Love ..... 149
6.1 Femininity and Love ..... 149
6.2 Young women ..... 157
6.2.1 Romantic love ..... 157
6.2.2 Impending engagements ..... 168
6.3 Wife ..... 171
6.3.1 Love and marriage ..... 171
6.4 Mothers ..... 173
6.4.1 Divorce ..... 174
6.5 Conclusion ..... 176
Chapter 7: Conclusion ..... 177
Bibliography ..... 186
Data bibliography ..... 206
Appendices ..... 224

## List of Appendices

Appendix 1 - Deepika Padukone at the 2018 Time 100 most influential people in the world gala in New York (Image source Satija: 2018) ..... 224
Appendix 2 - Priyanka Chopra at the 2016 Academy Awards in Los Angeles (Image source Rathod: 2017) ..... 224
Appendix 3 - Vidya Balan at the 2013 Cannes Film Festival in Cannes (Image source Vogue India: 2013) ..... 225
Appendix 4 - Aishwariya Rai at the 2017 Cannes Film Festival in Cannes (Image source IndiaToday: 2017) ..... 225
Appendix – 5 Padukone's wedding announcment (Image source deepikapadukone Instagram 2018) ..... 226
Appendix – 6 Padukone's Konkani wedding saree (Image source deepikapadukone Instagram 2018) ..... 226
Appendix 7 - Padukone's Sindhi wedding lehenga (Image source deepikapadukone Instagram 2018) ..... 227
Appendix 8 - Chopra's Hindu wedding lehenga (Image source sabyasachiofficial Instagram 2018) ..... 227
Appendix 9 - Chopra's Christian wedding dress (Image source priyankachopra Instagram 2018) ..... 228
Appendix 10 - Chopra's family wedding reception (Image source falgunishanepeacock Instagram 2018) ..... 228
Appendix 11 - Chopra's media wedding reception (Image source priyankachopra Instagram 2018) ..... 229
Appendix 12 - Chopra's Bollywood wedding reception (Image source abujanisandeepkhosla Instagram 2018) ..... 229
Appendix 13 - Padukone's family wedding reception (Image source deepikapadukone Instagram 2018) ..... 230
Appendix 14 - Padukone's media wedding reception (Image source deepikapadukone Instagram 2018) ..... 230
Appendix 15 - Padukone's Bollywood wedding reception (Image source deepikapadukone Instagram 2018) ..... 231

## List of Tables

Table 1: Social media following of research data.....27

## List of Figures

Figure 1: Initial assessment of Bollywood Life articles based on type of actress .....30

# Chapter 1: Introduction

## *1.1 Introduction to the study*

In her work on Indian soap operas, Munshi (2010) works through the complexities of three popular Indian soap operas. These shows are usually centred around a lead actress and actor who have some form of romantic union. Further focus is placed primarily on the lead actress. When considering the complexities of some of the lead women characters in the shows, Munshi encountered the explanation that one character was "governed by a lot of *sanskar* (values)" (2010: 140), while also defining *sanskar* as "tradition" in another instance (2010: 165). Similarly, Deveshv (2018) uses popular culture reference point *Urban Dictionary* to define *Sanskar* as "a Hindi word used in Indian culture to denote someone's upbringing and character". As part of understanding Indian femininities through this project, this notion of *sanskar* is central. More specifically, in relation to women, *sanskar* as a derivative word, becomes *sanskari* and this is seen as a central component of ideal Indian femininities. Demonstrating the pressure of this ideal, in 2016, *BuzzFeed* (Sheikh 2016a) published a tongue in cheek article titled "9 Simple Ways to Become The Perfect Sanskari Woman". In her article, Sheikh (2016a) light-heartedly considers the unrealistic expectations of Indian woman through the justifications of *sanskar*. Addressing the reader, she suggests that through these nine steps, "You, too, can earn the prestigious title of a 'suitable girl'" (2016a). In going through the specific ways in which idealised femininity manifests in this context, Sheikh considers issues of clothing, behaviour and domesticity. Through sarcastic illustrations she reminds the reader to, amongst other things, stay smiling and polite while also making an effort to "Make sure you're always dressed traditionally", to "Learn how to sit like a lady", all while remembering that "EVERYBODY likes a girl who cooks so make it your only strength" (Sheikh 2016a). Through clearly pointing out the unrealistic extremities of these expectations in a humorous way, the circulation of these issues in popular culture spaces speaks to the tension that many Indian women (geographical, cultural, diasporic) grapple with in contemporary times. Navigating the ever-changing nature of the contemporary world, while remaining cognizant of the pressures of culture and tradition, present a complex gender performance that requires further investigation.

This project departs from this point of view, which is a seemingly flippant window through which to view a fundamental marker of contemporary Indian femininity(ies) and the marred

and subjective terrain of portraying 'good' *sanskar*. While fiercely defensive of this as a feminist project, I am aware of the complex interpretations that might be assumed of a project on femininities, particularly Indian ones, seemingly indicating that there is one kind. However, the arguments within this thesis demonstrate the opposite. It is a feminist project interested in exploring and understanding the nuances of contemporary Indian femininity(ies) as something distinctly different from western manifestations in similar popular culture spaces. While the role of culture and tradition in manifestations of ideal forms of Indian femininity are noted in existing academic interventions (Parameswaran 2004; Runkle 2004; Reddy 2006), this project turns to Bollywood and its star system to get a better sense of the ways in which these ideals are circulated to audiences at large, both in and outside of India. In particular, the focus of this project is to look at the ways in which mainstream Indian media construct and disseminate understandings of gender and womanhood through specific coverage of Bollywood actresses. Turning to the media in this way is not unintentional. The media is constantly teaching us gender (Munford and Waters 2014). Indeed, it is not the only teacher of gender and its ideals but it is one of the most inherent, reified and powerful teachers of gender. With its inherence comes it's taken for granted-ness (Davis 1991). It is always around us, such that we often fail to recognise the impact it has in our everyday lives.

That being said, the ideals that are disseminated and circulated about femininity and masculinity are unmissable. The focus on ideal femininity, as though there is one kind in particular, is explicitly layered. As noted with Sheikh's (2016a) article, throughout a woman's life, ideals around how she should look, what she should and should not wear, what she should and should not eat, and how she should and should not behave are constantly made clear in the media. In contemporary times, these lessons can be said to be anchored within the theoretical discourse of postfeminism. Though explored in greater detail in the next chapter, postfeminism is best understood as a sensibility that focuses on women's agency and empowerment (Gill 2007). With this focus, it appears to render feminism irrelevant, while asserting that the gender equality that feminism fought for has been reached (Hua 2009). Resultantly, argues Gill (2007), with no perceived external male pressure, a liberated woman is able to make choices that suit her. These choices often manifest and play out around the physical female body linking to beauty, sex appeal and so on. However, in knowing that gender equality still only exists in feminist imagination, Sara Ahmed (2017 05) terms this a "fantasy of equality". She goes on to explain this fantasy as the idea that,

> women can now do it, even have it, or that they would have it if they just tried hard enough; that individual women can bring sexism and other barriers (we might describe these barriers as the glass ceiling or the brick wall) to an end through sheer effort or persistence or will. So much ends up being invested in our own bodies. We could call this a postfeminist fantasy: that an individual woman can bring what blocks her movement to an end; or that feminism has brought 'sexism, sexual exploitation or sexual oppression' to an end as if feminism has been so successful that it has eliminated its own necessity (Ahmed 2017 05).

This theoretical discourse then not only serves as a guide for analysis of the contemporary media landscape; it also works as a key theoretical component of this project. However, my relationship with postfeminism is tenuous. One of the biggest issues with initial understandings of postfeminism is its central focus on the lived experienced of white western women (Dosekun 2015). Consequently, this project and other non-western feminist perspectives argue that while the position remains relevant, at the same it also falters. Such a stance fundamentally disagrees with the assumption that operates within academia that lessons of these western texts simply resonate worldwide. Such an assumption ignores contextual and historical issues that different societies face. For example, one cannot discount the long lasting impact of colonial violence that many countries outside of the west still face today, which in turn directly influences how these societies navigate issues of identity.

As a result, in attempt to join efforts of the like of Dosekun (2015) and Spencer et al. (2018) to enhance understandings of the way in which issues around gender and femininity manifests and circulates globally, this project actively works to move away from western contexts looking to capture and understand the empirical nuances of contemporary urban femininity in India as per the English medium mainstream media in that space. In justifying such an approach, one can borrow from Spencer et al. who assert, "Given the prominent place popular cultural productions occupy in the shaping of people's thoughts, values and expectations, it is imperative to pay attention to how questions of gender are staged…" in spaces outside of the west (2018: 03). As a result, the project – which is centred in existing theoretical discussions around gender, femininity, feminism and postfeminism – works to establish the ways in which these empirical emergeations outside of the west weave in and around the unofficially established western benchmark of these understandings. Through

making sense of this, the project is able to present a more nuanced understanding of gender and femininity in the Indian context, thereby disproving the notion that gender and femininity(ies) outside the west can simply be understood in the same way they are understood in the west.

While understanding what it means to be Indian is key here, it is important to note that the project is not purporting a singular view or perception of what that means. There are a variety of languages, religions and cultures within India that ultimately impact on the direct and related concerns of this project. However, it is in the curated India of Bollywood that this project finds its nexus and, more specifically, in the realm of stardom and celebrity culture. In other words, the project ironically does not focus on Bollywood as a structure at all. Instead, it uses media who (re)present Bollywood stars, in particular women actresses, to audiences around the world. As part of contextualising the Indian context, it is important to note that India is indeed a patriarchal society. Alexander (2005: 23) defines patriarchy as an existing and reified system of oppression that allows for

> masculinized gestures of normalization [to] exert and deploy force, generate new sexual meanings, displace and reinscribe old meanings, and discipline and punish women in disproportionate ways for a range of imputed infractions, not the least of which has to do with being woman.

While patriarchy and its premise resonate worldwide, the way in which this impacts gender performance in different contexts differs. That patriarchy in India continues to plague the lives of Indian women is widely known. Articulating this, however, was often dismissed as an urban, middle class problem (Roy 2018). That this is not the case is obvious, however, this made it easier to disregard feminist attempts to fight against patriarchy. Roy (2018) notes that historically it was the more educated middle class and elite members of Indian society that engaged these issues and sought to better the plight of Indian women who were less fortunate and less privileged. While these efforts were successful in different cases and on smaller scales, patriarchy and all its violence remains a pressing problem in Indian society. Idealised Indian femininity remains linked closely to "…family, the private sphere, the purity of the nation and 'culture'" (Roy 2018).

Vijayalakshmi (2018) draws the example of sexual harassment in the workplace, noting that the micro and macro aggressions of sexual harassment have pushed many Indian women to leave work and focus on their domestic responsibilities as soon as they can afford to do so.

That the violence of patriarchy circles back to idealised femininity speaks volumes. Women were many times rendered powerless and forced to leave work based on the way in which patriarchal pressure favoured the perpetrators. In response to and in an effort to combat these issues, we watched in 2018 the eruption of the global #MeToo movement in India that was a clear response to the deeply entrenched culture of patriarchal violence that Indian women face. While Tella (2018) explains "India's dominant narrative has often been governed by instances of victim blaming or statements implying that women invited the sexual violence of which they were victims", the emergence of this movement aimed to change such thinking.

Tella (2018) notes that in India, while the #MeToo movement did find footing online, the reality of the context meant that it could not live solely online. She explains that the role of social media, though significant, was used mainly by "21st century 'millennial feminists' to bring about a new kind of conversation on forms of oppressions faced by women in India" (2018). These online spaces gave women a safe space for them to articulate their experiences away from the pressing realities of their patriarchal context and the disempowerment that it brings. Vetticad (2018b) explains that through speaking out in these forums, women were finding support in numbers. The significance of this support links to the ease with which patriarchal perpetrators are able to dismiss individual complaint. This is especially important in a society that clearly affords these perpetrators the opportunity to perform this violence while also granting them various patriarchal privileges at the same time. Vetticad (2018b) thereby also credits the Indian news media for also giving these stories publicity and attention such that consequences emerge. Noting somewhat of a shift with the emergence of this movement, Veteran journalist Barkha Dutt (2018) explains that in the past, even when she faced sexual harassment through her journalistic work though she was firm with those responsible, she never made it public because she worried that it would be trivialised and dismissed as an issue faced by someone not tough enough for the field. Dutt, therefore, explains that,

> The rage of Indian women – submerged thus far in the recesses of memory, wrapped away in swathes of fear and self-doubt, and suppressed for years by entrenched social stigma – has finally come pouring out to set in motion India's long-overdue #MeToo moment. Caught in the swirl of these floodwaters: an official in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government, journalists, actors, directors and writers – all accused of varying degrees of sexual harassment, misconduct or assault. Finally, India's

> women are pushing back against the corrosive abuse of male power. It is nothing short of a revolution (2018).

One of the first high profile instances of this movement in India was when Bollywood actress Tanushree Dutta spoke out about experiences she'd had with an actor while they were shooting a film in 2008. Post speaking out about her experiences, the actress was forced to engage a new bout of patriarchal violence when some responses to her story wondered if she was doing this to regain some fame in the industry. In actuality, she had laid a complaint in 2008 that was wholly ignored (2018). The emergence of this #MeToo movement in India allowed for a gap in an otherwise patriarchy heavy public discourse for Dutta to share her story again. More broadly, in addition to clearly demonstrating women's location in patriarchal hierarchy, this example also speaks to the highly problematic nature of a lot of what happens in mainstream Bollywood. Vetticad (2018b) elaborates on this in highlighting that "If Bollywood is viewed as the microcosm of India, then its present alacrity in acting on complaints…should be observed with a shovelful of salt…". In an effort to present a newfound awareness of the on-going issues faced by women in the industry, there may be some buy-in to this movement, which even includes some tangible consequences for the guilty. However, when looking at the sexist nature of Bollywood as a whole – both on and off screen – one realises that the problem goes much deeper than some care to realise. In 2003, when Aishwariya Rai acknowledged that during her relationship with Bollywood superstar Salman Khan she faced physical abuse, the consequences he faced were so limited that it barely impacted the rise of his stardom (2018b). As one of the most popular male superstars in the industry, known for drawing audiences to the cinema, Khan and his sexism have remained unchecked. Demonstrating this, Vetticad notes how he described the impact of his physical training for a role as a wrestler as leaving him feeling "like a raped woman" (2018b). While she notes that not many of his colleagues defended the remarks, the impact on his stardom was inconsequential.

These big male stars have a lot of power in the industry and that power has led to a culture of silence based on the fear of losing out on work. Much like broader societal patriarchal violence, this culture of silence was and continues to be at the expense of women. This powerlessness also translates onto the screen, especially in widely popular commercial '*masala*' films that are known for entertainment rather than riveting writing or acting

prowess. Khan specialises in these films. Gupta (2018) explains that often the leading actress (heroine) in these *masala* films are primarily there to look good on screen, further noting, "if there is a hero, he is at the forefront; a heroine's chief job is to worship and adore, and get out of the way when the heroes come out to play".

This is often demonstrated in the popular songs that emerge in some of these films. Gupta notes that "Cameras gliding down swaying body parts, and vulgar, double-meaning lyrics, are still an integral part of mainstream Bollywood" (2018). Examples of these lyrics include a popular actress lip synching and dancing to lyrics that have her saying in Hindi that she is a *tandoori* chicken, so swallow her with alcohol (ANI 2016); or others where the actor mouths to the desire of his on-screen affection, "When I was a gentleman to you, you said 'go away, rascal!' and gave me an attitude, I've been polite to you, but enough, Now I'll get dirty with you" (Sheikh 2016b). In another, the actor suggests "If I follow you, don't tell me not to, I have a right over you, you're my delight, if I stop you in your way, don't act shocked" (2016b). Of the songs in these films, Maanvi (2017) explains, "Hindi film songs in India are wildly popular. However, most of their lyrics (across decades) promote sexism, misogyny and a blatant disregard for consent". The fact that Maanvi's insights point to a link between these songs and the harassment Indian women face is telling. Maanvi further explains that these songs are often used to "tease and stalk" victims (2017).

Similarly, in stories on screen, the 'persistence' that comes through in the songs that disregard consent often translates to romantic success. Furthermore, in relation to the representation of gender in these stories, Ciecko (2001) notes that often seen as the main protagonist in the film, it is this male voice of reason that ensures that the women on screen adopt ideals that are 'suitable' in society. This is demonstrated in one of Bollywood's new age classics *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai.* Here it is suggested that only when the lead actress's character was made over from a short-haired tomboy to a long-haired chiffon *sari* wearing woman was she worthy of the lead actor's romance (Gupta 2018). Gupta further explains that these types of plots and the accompanying dialogues are so normalised that often one fails to recognise the misogyny. Chatterjee (2016: 1180) thereby argues that Bollywood "frames the cultural status of women in contemporary India". However, as time progresses one is also able to note a shift in Bollywood films, where nuanced stories by and about women exist, some of which don't even include a male lead. Gupta (2018) explains that in these films there

are female characters that "…expressed their needs, emotional and sexual, and they did things to change their circumstances, instead of snivelling and batting their eyelashes". While not always as wildly popular as the previously mentioned *masala* films, this is a shift in the right direction.

Off-screen, these actresses see extensive coverage about their lives in the mainstream media. Here, one is able to argue that through the content about these women the media are able to do the work of Indian femininity(ies). It is for this reason that the project turns to English medium mainstream Indian media for its data. As a result of the technological advances that facilitate globalisation, the consumption of this media is not limited to those who find themselves in India. Much like Bollywood films, these media texts are consumed around the globe by the Indian diaspora, as well as those interested in the content generally. English medium media in this regard is more globally transferable.

Consequently, it is through these complexities as a whole that the project finds its voice and asserts a new set of scholarly considerations: the project critically analyses and considers the ways in which a unique kind of femininity is performed by Bollywood actresses (as their personal identities and not their on-screen Bollywood characters). Through a close consideration of the themes of femininity and work, bodily femininity and femininity and love the study presents and engages with the nuances of performing contemporary urban femininity(ies) in Indian popular culture spaces. The framing of these women in the media serves as a regular reminder of the boundaries of ideal femininity(ies) in this context. Through close critical engagement with these themes identified above, this project traces how these values, seemingly unique to the Indian popular culture context, differs from those in other star systems and examples of celebrity culture. In particular, work such as that of Richard Dyer (2006) facilitated such nuanced understandings of Western perceptions and experiences of, at the time, the burgeoning world of fame. However, as this study will show, very little work exists that so dutifully engages women, popular culture and a star system so heavily enmeshed in tradition and morality, as is the case of the Indian system and its Bollywood stars.

Furthermore, the study is also greatly informed by the pioneering work of McRobbie (2003; originally published in 1978). In her pioneering study of English teen publication *Jackie* magazine, McRobbie investigated the ways in which adolescents learnt femininity through

engaging with media content, like *Jackie* magazine. McRobbie points out that the media creates and shapes consent in relation to and in line with societal hegemonies (2003). Media content is framed with specific intentions to favour certain ideals and discourage others. In celebrating certain aspects and shaming others, the media tends to encourage and discourage different aspects of gender performance in line with societal, ideological norms. The media's role in the gender socialisation process is thus fundamental.

McRobbie (2003: 36) notes that media content aimed at women stands in a position of power as "they define and shape the woman's world spanning every stage from early childhood to old age". She further argues that, while no male equivalent exists in the media[1], media content aimed at women tends to categorise a woman's life with the intention of coupling interest and age. In doing so, the media works towards naturalising and normalising a life-cycle for women that progresses in very specific ways. In identifying these stages/categories, the media generates and disseminates specific content to the audiences that fall within each category. As such, McRobbie suggests,

> By isolating a particular phase or age as the focus of interest, one which coincides roughly with that of its readers, the magazine is ascribing to age, certain ideological meanings (2003:36).

McRobbie's assertions form one of the foundational elements of this project which is about the importance of media influence. However, this project differs from McRobbie's work on *Jackie* in various ways. Firstly, the project looks at contemporary times as compared to McRobbie's work that was conducted in the 1970s in Britain, an era in which the magazine as a medium held different power. Secondly, this project also looks at a different geographical context. This project moves away from western examples to broaden the horizons of understandings of gender in society today. Thirdly, using English medium Indian mainstream media content about Bollywood actresses, the project is able to capture and map the nuances of contemporary urban Indian femininity(ies). Looking at content specifically about young Bollywood actresses and the progressions into wifehood and motherhood as categories of normative femininity provides a detailed account of the nature of contemporary

[1] Since the publication of McRobbie's study in 1978 there has been an explosion of men's magazines in the media market, however despite this, her point around the difference in the ways in which the lives of men and women are discussed in the mainstream media is still valid today.

urban Indian femininity as per the mainstream Indian media. As a result, the analytical chapters in this project occur via a dual thematic approach. Firstly, overarching themes of femininity and work, bodily femininity and femininity, and love were identified in the data and influence the individual structure of these analytical chapters, Secondly, the chapters also look at how popular culture formations of gender around these themes emerge in relation to the categories of a woman's life, as noted by McRobbie in her work.

From initial scans of media coverage about Bollywood actresses, one is quickly able to understand what Roy (2018) means when she explains idealised Indian femininity as linked to domesticity, tradition and culture. Yuval-Davis (1997) theorises this in relation to the understanding that in many contexts women are seen as carriers of culture and nationhood. The role of tradition (often used as a term that encapsulates both culture and nationhood) finds great footing in this context especially because of how closely it intertwines within understandings of the ideal in relation to gender. Here, tradition is the anchor that sometimes gently, sometimes forcefully reminds a person of the boundaries within which their identity exists. An Indian woman who acknowledges her culture is considered cultured and exemplary. This is why the Hindi word *sanskari*, which describes just this, is arguably a sensibility of Indian femininity(ies) today. While this is unpacked in greater detail in the theoretical discussions chapter that follows this one it is important to note that this role of tradition in the ideal was especially highlighted with the emergence of what is termed the new Indian woman (Basu: 2001). The ideal in this regard is a woman who is comfortable and versed in the demands of modern spaces while still being deeply anchored by her ties to Indian culture. While an unfortunate dichotomy between modern and traditional does emerge as a result of this, how this manifests in reality is a lot more complex and nuanced. It is these complexities and nuances that this project works to demonstrate through analysing media coverage of Bollywood actresses.

Through celebrity studies one is able to acknowledge that these actresses also serve the role of exemplars of ideal Indian femininity through the media coverage they receive. As a result, a cognisance on the part of these women to perform their gender in ways that acknowledges the different facets of ideal Indian femininity is thus very important. Rao (2010: 06) explains, "Media representation can depict India's shifting relation with the world economy, but must retain its 'Indianness' in moments of dynamic hybridity". Regular examples that demonstrate

this can be noted. When Bollywood actresses have attended international red-carpet events at least one of their poses as they work through the media line-up is the traditional Indian greeting of Namaste[2]. Examples of this include Deepika Padukone at the 2018 Time Magazine 100 most influential people in the world gala in New York (Appendix 1), Priyanka Chopra at the Academy Awards 2016 in Los Angeles (Appendix 2) or Vidya Balan (Appendix 3) and Aishwarya Rai (Appendix 4) at the Cannes Film Festival in 2013 and 2017, respectively. Though a simple gesture, acknowledging culture and tradition in this way demonstrates that for these women, part of the gender performance that they undertake includes acknowledging their "Indianness". Based on the global nature of these specific appearances, elements of pride can also be noted, linking to issues such as national identity. Nonetheless, acknowledging "Indianness" is important when engaging theoretically with issues of gender performance and femininity of contemporary, urban Indian women.

## *1.2 Aims*

The aim of this project is to critically engage media representations of Indian femininities through the analytical categories of young woman, wife and mother, as they appear in mainstream Indian media spaces. The project aims to understand the intricate nuances of womanhood in this space as it relates to postfeminism and its ideals.

## *1.3 Research questions*

1. What are the nuances that emerge in Indian manifestations of postfeminism through mainstream media coverage of Bollywood actresses?
2. How do these nuances complicate dominant western understandings and representations of these issues, and do they provide new possibilities for understanding different kinds of celebrity womanhood?

## *1.4 Methodology*

In the context of feminist based research on issues of gender in and around the mainstream media, this project operates within the qualitative realm. Specifically the project considers

2 An Indian greeting with Hindu origins that in addition to verbally saying the word is also represented via the placement of one's hands together at chest level. Jain (2018) explains, "The gesture is said to express honor, courtesy, politeness, hospitality and gratitude to the other person."

media content from online Bollywood news site *Bollywood Life*, Bollywood celebrity talk show *Koffee with Karan* as well as Instagram pages of the actresses mentioned in the first two sets of data. This will be discussed in further detail in the sections to come.

## *1.5 Research design*

In aiming to explore the discourse around gender and femininities as disseminated by the mainstream media, this project will utilise the research methods of discourse and textual analysis. As an analytic approach, discourse analysis presents an alternate to what Fairclough (2001: 02) terms the "widespread underestimation of the significance of language in the production, maintenance, and change of social relations of power". This is particularly important when noting the socially constructed nature of a variety of factors that intersect and influence everyday life. Consequently, Carbo et al. (2016: 366) point out that "discourse is sustained in the epistemological orientation of the 'construction of the social reality'". Herzog (2016) indicates the importance of discourse analysis as a methodology that puts forward research that is thoughtful, contextual and measured. Discourse analysis also allows for a thorough examination of the way in which meaning is composed and engaged with (Carbo et al. 2016). This is crucial, based on the notion that the ways in which discourse and its power are understood are neither straightforward nor clear (Blommaert and Bulcaen 2000).

Building on the analysis possible with discourse analysis as a methodological approach, the project also makes use of textual analysis to add further dimension to the analysis presented. Fairclough (2003) explains that textual analysis is especially useful when used in conjunction with other research methodologies. He further draws clear links between discourse and textual analysis. This is likely because textual analysis operates around a similar premise to discourse analysis. As a methodological approach, textual analysis is best understood as "a way for researchers to gather information about how human beings make sense of the world" (McKee 2003: 01). Fairclough (2003: 10) builds on this in noting that textual analysis is fundamentally interested in the "processes of meaning-making." He further explains that textual analysis places greater focus on text production and how meaning is embedded into it than on text reception solely. Holland and Novak (2017: 295) build on this explaining that through textual analysis, the researcher is able to unpack issues of "power and social inequality" in texts.

## *1.6 Data selection*

In a project looking at the way in which expectations around femininity manifest through discourse around Bollywood actresses in English medium mainstream Indian media it is clear that a variety of case studies needed to be selected. Choosing mainstream English medium media, as obvious as that may be, was intentional. Mainstream in this context is understood as having a mass reach and appeal. Such a reach and appeal in turn leads to the wide consumption of these texts, not just in the geographical space of its origin, but also via globalised channels of media information flow connecting to the diaspora and so on. This also makes this reach extensive and at times difficult to measure. However, more importantly, Basu (2001) notes that it is in the arena of popular or mainstream media that gender dynamics in line with dominant patriarchal hegemonies are maintained. Kenix (2011) attributes this to mainstream media often being understood as primary sources of information in contemporary times. She further explains that as part of maintaining the dominance of the mainstream in society such texts actively "aim to maximize audiences through pack journalism that is conventional and formulaic, which results in content that can be binary and reductive" (2011: 19). Spencer et al. (2018: 04) thus build on this through engaging the work of Okome and Newell in noting the importance of recognising that despite the everydayness of popular culture and its accompanying texts, together they create "spaces for marginalized voices to interrogate gender issues in ways that are transgressive, unruly, untidy, risk taking but also life affirming and pleasurable." Basu (2001: 181) further adds to this argument in pointing out that these popular texts, "…are complex sites for showing tensions between feminism and dominant constructions of femininity, between power and pleasure; they illustrate the difficulties of talking about social change through popular commercial media" (2001: 181).

Mainstream media texts, therefore, play an important role in the discursive constructions of gender that are disseminated to audiences. In relation to gender, Thapan (2004: 439) explains that a "woman experiences her embodiment in the public and social domain through a collage of visual and textual representations". This is particularly poignant considering Basu's point about the impact of the mainstream media when she maintains that nothing can compare to its reach (2001). In turn, this reach is sold to advertisers in order to earn a profit. Basu argues that within mainstream media, "even when images are not selling a product directly they may be helping make certain forms of consumption normative and utopian" (2001: 180). The

discourses that exist within these texts do not just link to gender, but also various other issues, like class, that influence that context.

The mention of class in relation to the discourse within mainstream media texts is also one of the two factors that influenced the data selection process. Based on the nature of postfeminism and its link to consumption and the middle class in society, it was clear that this project needed to use media platforms that spoke to these dynamics. As such, the choice of English media content specifically was a response to this. Talking specifically about print media, Parameswaran (2005: 421) explains that,

> The audiences for the English-language print media in India are primarily urban and upwardly mobile, educated middle classes, a socioeconomic group that the state identified as the one of prime markets for the sale of global lifestyle consumer goods.

I argue that such an observation is easily extendable to other English medium mainstream media platforms in India. In 2005, when Parameswaran made her point, many of the currently popular web platforms did not exist. The prevalence and popularity of such online platforms has expanded more recently and has also given rise to the further popularity of platforms like television, where people also engage the content online. These platforms also use English as the medium of communication and so the same can be understood about their target audience. As such, it was clear that English medium mainstream media platforms needed to be chosen.

Additionally, when looking at existing research within the realm of the mainstream media and femininity in India, the focus was largely on English medium Indian magazines specifically. As important as these studies were, the focus on magazines again linked to the amount of mainstream media platforms available at the time. Newer media platforms were likely not available or not as mainstream. The novelty of my project, therefore, results from the selection of media content other than print media platforms like magazines.

When dealing with mainstream media platforms, the easiest way to justify this mainstream nature is through readership and viewership numbers. Unfortunately, these are not readily available and alternate ways of measuring the mainstream had to be devised. I, therefore, explored the online profile of various platforms, looking at their Twitter, Facebook and Instagram followers. This works because these publications/platforms tend to promote their

content on their social media if not directly sharing the content itself. This in turn demonstrates the reach Basu (2001) speaks about.

Taking all of these factors into consideration, various texts were identified once they met the requirement of being mainstream, English medium platforms that disseminated content about Bollywood. While initially two websites were selected, the data collected resulted in a corpus that was too big for this project. As a result, the decision was made to only work with one website. Furthermore, the talk show selected was unique in that it is hosted by a Bollywood director, someone who is a Bollywood insider. As such, there was no second English medium mainstream talk show as popular as the selected show that the project could have engaged with. Thus, the final platforms that were selected are the website *Bollywood Life* and the television talk show *Koffee with Karan*.

*Bollywood Life* is an online portal that focuses primarily on Bollywood news and gossip. Taking advantage of the instant nature of the platform, the site publishes large amounts of articles every day. The portal is also much like other online portals that are often the first to report on and engage with breaking news based on the 'always on' nature of the internet. Despite English being its primary medium, the site offers readers a Hindi version of its content, thereby aiming to cater to as large an audience as possible. While there are a variety of websites that publish content about Bollywood, this site was chosen for a variety of reasons. While participation in online media is likely limited in India based on issues of poverty, access and the digital divide, *Bollywood Life* still seems to have a significant following online (4.8 million people across Twitter and Facebook – see Table1). In addition to their reach, the site regularly publishes large amounts of comparatively longer articles, which provides more content in terms of data analysis for this project. These articles are also easily available online due to the website's relatively extensive digital archive.

The television talk show *Koffee with Karan* is one of the few English talk shows that focuses on Bollywood and that sees great popularity. The seasonal show airs weekly when in production. The show is hosted by Bollywood filmmaker Karan Johar and every episode sees the host in conversation with usually one or two Bollywood celebrities. These conversations happen primarily in English, with small portions of conversational Hindi that were easy to translate as required. The host Karan Johar was named the worlds most followed filmmaker

online (Filmfare 2018). In addition to his Twitter and Facebook following mentioned below (See Table 1), his overall following across all social media reaches more than 25 million people. This is especially noteworthy in the context of choosing this show as an example of mainstream media because it is his name, fame and social media presence that promotes the show. However, beyond just measuring the reach of the show based on the hosts online following, this show gains a lot of attention in the Indian media. Publications excitedly write about the happenings in each episode, focusing specifically on any candid and/or controversial statements made by the celebrity guests. While viewership numbers are not available, the language barrier may well be an issue that impacts on its popularity from a statistical point of view. However, the way in which the show's content is picked up across other media platforms makes up for how audiences engage with the program itself. If one consumes Bollywood news, it is hard to miss stories about this show when it is on air. It is this publicity that also makes this show one of the biggest Bollywood talk shows in the industry.

| **Text** | **Medium** | **Twitter Following** | **Facebook Likes** | **Instagram Following** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Bollywood Life | Online | 640000[3] | 3.95 Million[4] | 363000[5] |
| Koffee with Karan | Television | 16.7 Million[6] | 605982[7] | 9.6 Million[8] |

**Table 1: Social media following of research data**

Apart from the popularity of the platforms, and perhaps more importantly, these platforms are also prominent cogs in the Bollywood celebrity machine. As part of promoting upcoming films, the star/s of films often pose for exclusive cover spreads and give interviews to these magazines, websites and television shows, resulting in an increased buzz around the film, the star and the magazine/site/show. There is engagement with a variety of Bollywood celebrities in all of the chosen platforms. Through their content, all platforms scrutinise celebrities and

3 (bollywood_life: 2019)

4 (TheBollywoodlife: 2019)

5 (ibollywoodlife: 2019)

6 (karanjohar: 2019a)

7 (karanjohar: 2019b)

8 (karanjohar: 2019c)

celebrity life in great detail, thereby offering detailed material required for the analysis in this project.

Lastly, I also made the decision to collect data from Bollywood actresses' Instagram accounts. In using the online presence to justify the choice of *Bollywood Life* and *Koffee with Karan* as mainstream, the same can be said about the Instagram profiles of these actresses based on the fact that their following on Instagram alone outweighs the followings of the selected Bollywood news website or Johar. However, Instagram differs in that it is assumed that the actresses have a lot more control over what they disseminate to fans and audiences worldwide, thereby giving the corpus of data an interesting additional perspective. Here Spencer et al. (2018: 05) argue,

> The advent of social media and digital platforms has expanded the scope for debate, play, creativity and the generation of affect, all of which have implications for gender debates. Social media is central to conversations about the self, about publicness, about consumerism, conspicuous consumption, visibility and resistance.

As a result, the decision to include this data in the overall corpus provided the project with fascinating additional data to work with. It is, however, important to note that while ethically some may argue that there are considerations to be made about using people's social media posts when collecting data, the posts selected were only those from public profiles. This meant that the actresses were aware of the fact that these posts were circulated widely, largely for public consumption.

Furthermore, as part of properly locating this choice theoretically, when looking to theoretical discussions about celebrity usage of Instagram, much of these discussions focus specifically on selfies. While the Instagram data that this project uses is not limited to celebrity selfies alone, the wider premise of the points being made theoretically apply to those posts that are not necessarily selfies. The foundation here is that it is through these media platforms that celebrities now have direct contact with the audience (Howells 2011). Jerslev and Mortensen (2016), therefore, argue that celebrities are able to use social media platforms as vehicles of expression, where they have instant and uninterrupted access to their fans and followers. Despite the largely one sidedness of the exchange, "…celebrity selfies seldom offer new, substantial information but nurture the relation with fans, and so forth, who acknowledge this effort with likes and comments" (2016: 252).

Marshall (2010: 39) thus adds to this in describing such platforms as both a "…a media *and* communication form". It is then through these platforms that celebrities and their followers are able to foster a "digital intimacy"; where, through posts on platforms like Instagram, celebrities are able to "…display the 'authentic' and 'private' persona…" (Jerslev and Mortensen 2016: 249). Marshall (2010) adds to this in arguing that in addition to the craft that a celebrity is known for, they also perform their celebrity status on these platforms. Jerslev and Mortensen (2016) link this to celebrities wanting and need to extend their own celebrity status through sharing these posts with waiting and wanting fans and followers. Such posts are said to enhance the connection these audiences have with these celebrities because of the ways in which they are made to feel, as though they have direct access to the said celebrity (2016). In addition to personal and anecdotal glimpses from their life, these celebrities are also able to use such platforms to "exhibit the artistic/media personality, advertise new artistic products and consumer goods, supply content to celebrity and entertainment news, promote or cross-promote other brands, and so forth" (2016: 250). Thus, when considering what this project looks at, the significance of these posts adds a rich layer to the already dynamic corpus of data for this project.

## *1.7 Data collection*

As the intentions of this project materialised, two issues became clear when thinking about data collection. The first was that a variety of mainstream media platforms needed to be considered. This linked primarily to the (incorrect) assumption on my part that rich content about actresses would be limited. While the eventual data sources selected are made clear above, in response to estimation that one needed to consider a variety of media platforms, the initial intention of the project was to collect data from two Bollywood news websites, two Bollywood magazines, as well as one Bollywood talk show. Secondly, based on the constantly on-going nature of Bollywood media, it also became important to consider a time frame for this data collection that was neither too short nor too long. This was especially because one of the central aims of the project was to map the shifts and progressions that happen as these women live their lives in youth, wifehood and motherhood. As a result, it was decided that a data collection period of three months would yield a corpus of data that would allow the project to meet its aims. These three months would be consecutive in order

to properly plug in to any existing narratives that may otherwise be lost in isolation. This period was identified as 1 January to 31 March 2017.

Here data collection involved sourcing the different magazines from India, collecting all relevant articles on the two websites daily, as well as transcribing the interviews from the selected talk show. However, by the end of January 2017 it became increasingly evident that the initial choices made with regards to data selection and collection was resulting in an overly bloated data corpus that was especially unbalanced as a result of the dominance of the Bollywood news websites that publish numerous articles every day. While this was expected to an extent when comparing daily data of the websites to once weekly data of the talk show or twice monthly of the magazines, in actuality this imbalance was exponential. Furthermore, the data already collected in one month would have been enough for this project. However, pursuing this project with just the initial one month of data alone would not have enabled an analysis that looked at micro issues of femininity(ies), as well as macro issues of shifts and progressions that happen more broadly in the data. This data imbalance also meant that media content about the more popular category, young woman, also dominated the corpus, which would then also limit the overall objectives of the project. This is demonstrated in Figure 1 below that highlights the data collected for one of the Bollywood websites. Here it is made clear that 77% of the data collected from *Bollywood Life* in January 2017 was about young women. A remaining 17% of the data was about actresses who are also mothers, while only 5% of the data was about actresses who are wives. While the dominance of the young actress category (which remained throughout the three months) was an interesting result in and of itself, the project needed more.

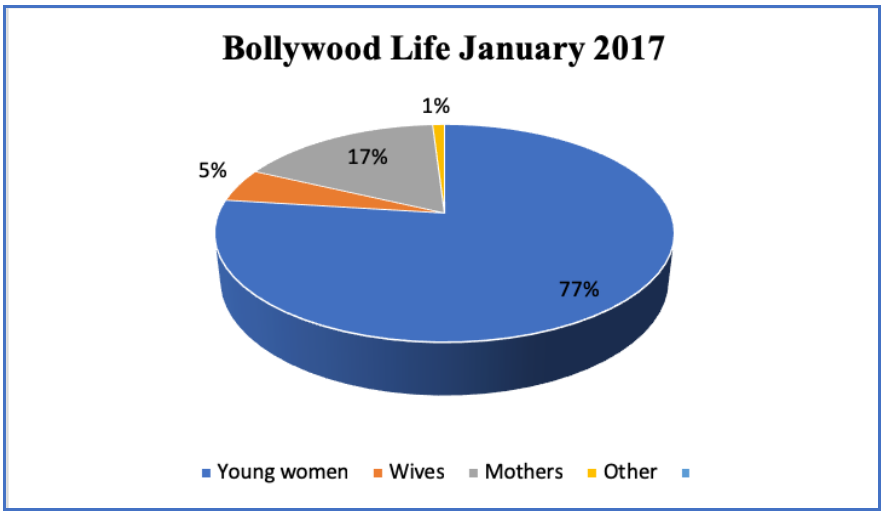


**Figure 1: Initial assessment of Bollywood Life articles based on type of actress**

As a result, the decision was taken to re-establish a new plan for data collection. Here, magazines were dropped completely (justified by the observation that existing work on Indian femininities and the media looked primarily at magazines). The decision was also made to work with only one Bollywood News website, based on the sheer amount of data that was coming from these sources. *Bollywood Life* was thus chosen based on its wider reach than the other site initially considered. The talk show, *Koffee with Karan*, remained as part of the novelty of a project of this sort, working with media texts that were previously unexplored in relation to this topic in the Indian context.

In addition to this, in attempt to keep to the three-month data collection period in a way that yielded a manageable data corpus for a project of this nature, further specifications were required in relation to the *Bollywood Life* website. Through establishing publishing trends via the data collected in January 2017, publication averages were calculated for the seven days of the week. Through this data I was able to identify the two days of the week that had the highest publishing average. As a result, the decision was made to only collect and use *Bollywood Life* data published on Wednesday and Thursday of every week in the three-month data collection period. This yielded a total of 426 articles that were collected for this project.

In terms of actual collection, on data collection days I visited the *Bollywood Life* regularly, collecting every article that discussed anything about Bollywood actresses. Those that made no mention of any Bollywood actress in any form were ignored. Collection here meant copying and pasting these articles into a chronologically ordered document, which resulted in a catalogued corpus of data. Beyond this, in relation to the talk show *Koffee with Karan*, I transcribed every episode that featured or discussed Bollywood actresses. As the show was in the middle of its fifth season in the data collection period I was able to consider 12 episodes for this project. While not all 12 of the episodes yielded relevant data, one was only able to establish this after watching the episode. At the time of data collection, the episodes were freely available online via the Indian channel's website. They were also aired on South African satellite television. The transcriptions, therefore, happened using both available platforms.

Beyond this, the decision was also made at a later date to include data from the Instagram pages of relevant Bollywood actresses. This linked largely to the ways in which one can understand such self-representation on the parts of these women as having a greater relevance when understanding such acts in relation to postfeminist discursive practice. Through a survey of the data collected from *Bollywood Life* and *Koffee with Karan* a list emerged of all the actresses mentioned over the 426 articles and 12 episodes. Using this list, I then worked to establish which of these women have functioning, public Instagram pages and then collected data from these pages. Collection here involved taking screenshots of the actresses' images and their corresponding captions from this platform in the same period of 1 January to 31 March 2017. However, in an effort to collect Instagram data that was also balanced, I further narrowed this down to match the data collection specifications of the *Bollywood Life*, thereby only collecting data posted every Wednesday and Thursday during the data collection period of the first three months of 2017. Doing this after the data collection period was not a challenge because of the way Instagram archives older posts. This data was then also catalogued chronologically.

## *1.8 Data analysis*

As the data was collected, it was organised into three categories based on normative notions of the trajectory of a woman's life, namely young woman, wife and mother. This was done based on the theoretical foundations considered for this project (McRobbie 2003). It was possible because of my own knowledge of these Bollywood actresses in relation to them being married and/or mothers. This type of sorting from the outset meant that the large amount of data collected was easily organised. Furthermore, from the start, the assumption about organising data in this way was linked to being able to properly map progressions that may or may not happen once the analysis began.

After all the data was collected, each of the three categories were analysed individually. The intentional focus on analysing one category at a time was to allow the data to speak for itself rather than force it to fit any preconceived notions. Here, each article and transcript was surveyed in detail, where key points and quotes were marked, and notes and observations were made about broader themes that began to emerge within each category. Adopting a thematic approach here, I was soon able to further sorted the material in relation to each

actress discussed within that theme. Such a structured approach enabled one to easily get a clear sense of thematic trends and narratives that emerged on both micro and macro levels in the data. Once this was done within each category, the three categories were considered together in order to establish any overarching links. Through this process, three key themes emerged that contained almost all the identified subthemes in all three categories. These three main themes then also became the individual analysis chapters in this project. They are:

- Femininity and work
- Bodily femininity
- Femininity and love

Once this was decided, I worked with each theme individually, where a discourse analysis was conducted. Here, overall and recurring patterns identifying the discourse around actresses as per the themes were considered. Attention was paid to both what was explicitly said, wording and tone, as well as what was implied. It was also in this process that the decision was made to include all three categories of data in the same thematic chapter. This ensured that the progression a young woman is expected to make into wifehood and then motherhood is easier to follow based on the way the analysis is organised and presented in the chapter. However, what soon became evident was that discourse analysis alone was not enough. Through the organic motions of this process, I realised than rather than just analysing discourse, my arguments were actually performing a kind of textual analysis in order to create a discourse about contemporary urban Indian femininity(ies). I thus decided to also incorporate a textual analysis based approach to this analysis to properly capture what the project was setting out to do.

In addition to this, once the Instagram data was collected, these posts were plugged into the relevant categories and themes in the data corpus. Once properly located, one was able to analyse the text and its discourse and include this in the relevant arguments being made in the analysis of the other data. However, in addition to this, a visual analysis was also required to properly grapple with the visual components of the images. This included looking at what was focused on in the image, what the implied meaning of the image in conjunction with the caption was, as well as how the actresses performed their own gender and femininity while engaging the audience through these posts.

Following this when writing up the analysis, a dual thematic approach quickly emerged. Each chapter focuses on and unpacks material directly relating to that specific theme. However, each chapter also makes use of the categories identified via the engagement with the arguments McRobbie (2003) makes about the way in which the media targets women at different stages of their lives. As relevant as this work was it remained limited to a very specific context. As a result, the intention of this project was to specifically carry this premise to a contemporary popular culture context in which it didn't exist prior to this project. As such, through the Bollywood actresses, that themselves were at different stages of their lives (youth, marriage, motherhood), material is presented both individually but also in conversation with each other. In considering the interlinked nature of the narratives within the data, each chapter was able to also map a shift discourse as a woman moves from her youth, to wifehood and then motherhood. As such, within each larger thematic chapter, analysis is organised via these three categories. Necessary subthemes exist within the umbrella themes of young woman, wife and mother. The intentional repetition of this structure through all three analytical chapters stems from being able to present as holistic an understanding of these femininities as possible.

As such, these methodological choices successfully guided the project towards its intention of working to unpack the ways in which mainstream English medium Indian media construct contemporary urban Indian femininity(ies) via the coverage of Bollywood actresses. While the chapters that follow present the arguments being made in this regard, it is important to visit the overall structure of the project as a whole. Following this introductory chapter, the project turns to Chapter 2, where the relevant theoretical engagements that work as the foundation of the project are presented. This chapter begins with a detailed engagement with postfeminism, which is one of the key theoretical areas of the project. This then sets up the need to revisit discussions on feminism as part of contextualising the engagement with postfeminism. Following this, the chapter moves to grapple with the notion of a more global postfeminism, where criticisms of original versions of postfeminism are considered in depth. As a result of this project's focus on empirical data stemming from India, the chapter then moves to introduce and contextualise the Indian context in relation to gender and femininity. Thereafter, the chapter engages relevant theoretical discussions on gender and affect, femininity, as well as celebrity culture and Bollywood.

The project then moves on to Chapter 3, which serves as a context chapter that frames the analytical chapters that follow. Using the recent examples of two separate weddings of popular Bollywood actresses Deepika Padukone and Priyanka Chopra, the chapter considers issues of contemporary urban Indian femininity in relation to these actresses and their weddings, as well as in relation to the media content that emerged post their weddings. As part of contextualising the issues at play in relation to contemporary Indian femininity(ies), the chapter works to consider the ways in which Indian femininity(ies) emerges at a global level through these two weddings. Recognising these issues and their circulation in the mainstream realm paves the way for the detailed analysis that follows about these femininities via Bollywood actresses.

The three analytical chapters follow immediately after this. Each of these chapters begins with a theoretical discussion directly relevant to the thematic considerations of that chapter. This theoretical discussion then works the theoretical foundations laid out in Chapter 2 to properly inform the analysis that follows. Additionally, each of these three chapters also follows a similar format, where analysis begins with considerations around actresses who are young woman, then wives and finally mothers. As noted, this links to the ways in which McRobbie's (2003) argument about how the media categorises a woman's life influences the direction of this project as a whole. Organising the analysis in this way enables one to track the progressions and shifts that occur and that are expected in contemporary Indian femininity(ies) as women progress along the idealised trajectory of their life as per societal hegemony. The importance of such organisation links to the its ability to yield a detailed understanding of the micro and macro issues that exist in relation to the exemplary femininity circulated in the mainstream media via these women.

The analysis begins with Chapter 4, which is about femininity and work. This chapter considers issues around young women and professional work, everyday work and vocal work, married women working after marriage and issues of balance in relation to motherhood and work. Chapter 5 then looks at bodily femininity, where subthemes of the feminine body as well as styled perfection emerge around young women. Through the shift to wifehood, one encounters more traditional bodily femininity which shifts further in motherhood, where analysis revolves around subthemes of the feminine body and embracing motherhood. Finally, in Chapter 6 the project looks at femininity and love. Relating to young women, subthemes of analysis include romantic love and impending engagements. Once married, the

subtheme of love and marriage is considered in relation to married women. Finally, in relation to women who are mothers, the issues of divorce emerged. The project then concludes in Chapter 7.

# Chapter 2: Theoretical Discussions

One of the novelties of the project is the way in which it is able to pull together these areas of work to culminate in a theoretical foundation that guides the analysis that follows. As a starting point, the primary theoretical outlook of this project is postfeminism. This chapter begins by presenting the relevance of postfeminism as part of making sense of broader narratives at work in contemporary gender performance, as well as contemporary gendered mainstream media flows. Through this discussion, the chapter arrives at a juncture that requires a more detailed discussion on feminism and its history. This is done both as part of contextualising the feminist standpoint of the paper, as well as to demonstrate how, through the history of the movement, we got to the emergence and prevalence of postfeminism seen today. Having established the proper context, the chapter then re-enters the discussion of postfeminism to consider the ways in which it distinguishes itself from the feminist movement. Thereafter, the chapter moves to engage the largest critique of postfeminism, that its focus is placed only on the lives of white western women. Here the chapter underlines the call made by Dosekun (2015) to understand postfeminism as less one dimensional and more in relation to a transnational culture. In the same way that the research turns to the Indian context to further demonstrate the relevance of this argument, so the chapter looks at the Indian context. This is done to better understand contemporary urban Indian femininity(ies), as well as different issues in that space that influence the nuances that emerge. Coupled with postfeminism, these understandings directly influence the conceptualisation of the project as a whole. Following this, the chapter unpacks the issue of affect, based on its significance in the dissemination process of gender ideals in the media. The chapter then presents key discussions on femininity and feminine ideals both historically and in contemporary times. The chapter finally concludes with a discussion on celebrity culture and Bollywood.

## *2.1 Postfeminism*

Through more recent times in the history of the feminist movement, one has been able to witness the emergence of newer feminisms that actively sought to discredit previous feminist interventions resulting in fractures in the movement. These newer feminisms remained clear in their mandate to reintroduce more traditional understandings of femininity (Munford and Waters 2014). hooks (2000) reiterates this observation explaining that sexist versions of femininity are re-emerging to undo much of what the feminist movement has already achieved. Hinds and Stacey (2001: 153) thereby describe this as a new form of feminism that

is a "glamorous makeover off the old-fashioned, drab and over-serious 'women's liberationists' of the past". Hemmings (2018) builds on this, explaining that this makeover aims to highlight the ways in which women today are empowered but also feminine. This new feminism is firmly located within the mainstream, intentionally so. It presents a visually appealing form of feminism that finds the right balance between contemporary and traditional in order to maintain the patriarchal status quo. Here,

> femininity is rendered a hallmark of rather than a bar to feminism: indeed, we can now see that it has been lurking under the surface waiting to be appreciated as feminism's glasses are whipped off and its hair shaken out to reveal the shining beauty underneath (Hemmings 2018: 07).

As a whole, postfeminism emerged as "a set of assumptions, widely disseminated within popular media forms, having to do with the 'pastness' of feminism, whether what is supposedly past is merely noted, mourned or celebrated" (Tasker and Negra 2007: 01). Dosekun (2015) adds to this in explaining postfeminism as something that understands women to be empowered and free, thereby enabling women to reject the relevance of feminism and focus on new femininities. Barger (2011: 345) argues that postfeminism

> rewrites the history of women in that there is no patriarchy to overcome and no political battle to wage. The battle is in recreating the self with individual choice. Instead of female solidarity, one sees narcissistic individualism, women pitted against women in a field of unlimited opportunities. The only impediments are the choices one makes. The exercise of personal power quickly reduces to the choice in nail color. Instead of the personal being political, the personal effaces the political.

This individualism reveals the strong ties between postfeminism and neoliberalism. Butler (2013) explains neoliberalism to be a globally dominant approach that focuses on privatisation, self-gain (strongly linked to capitalism) and the increased commodification of everyday life. The impacts and influences of neoliberalism are extensive and not just linked to economic aspects of life. Neoliberalism also influences cultural, political and social realms of society. Socially and culturally, neoliberal approaches give rise to and encourage self-centred members of society that focus primarily on the individual. With the inherent focus on oneself, individuals become increasingly inwardly focused, self-aware and ambitious for personal gain. As such, Butler argues that neoliberalism "provides fertile ground for the

development of discourses that emphasise consumer citizenship, personal responsibility, and individual empowerment" (2013: 41). However, these levels of individualism lead to renewed power inequalities and orders with regards to issues of class, race, sexuality and gender (Butler 2013).

Consequently, parallels can be drawn between neoliberalism and postfeminism. Much like neoliberalism, postfeminism also emphasises individualism, agency and freedom of choice as elements of empowerment (Butler: 2013). Links between postfeminism and consumerism can also be made. Lazar (2006: 505) describes postfeminism as a "consumer-oriented discourse", understanding postfeminism in the following ways,

> (i) as critical of any definition of women as victims unable to control their own lives; (ii) as skewed in favour of liberal humanism, embracing a flexible ideology which can be adapted to suit individual needs and desires; and (iii) as implicitly heterosexist in orientation by always finding a space for men in the picture (Lazar 2006: 505).

McRobbie (2007: 721) notes that within a postfeminist context, femininity can be understood in ways that "are now more weighted towards capacity, success, attainment, enjoyment, entitlement, social mobility and participation". Thus, within this context, there are strong links established between femininity, the female body and feminine consumption. Resultantly, pressure emerges on women to perform their femininity in very specific ways. Discussing this pressure, Ahmed (2017: 49) explains, "pressure does not always feel harsh. A pressure can begin with a light touch. A gentle encouragement: Go this way, go that way. Be happy, don't be happy". What remains clear, however, is the idea that there is a right type of femininity, as per postfeminism. Part of this liberated feminine performance involves various acts of consumption, including shopping for the latest fashion and paying for regular beauty treatments. However, despite this, McRobbie (2004: 255) argues that postfeminism is best understood as a "double entanglement" that conflates both liberalism and conservativism in relation to gender. While on one hand a variety of liberated performances of gender are encouraged, on the other strong links back to patriarchy can be seen in the way in which the performance of femininity is policed in very specific ways. This gives rise to what McRobbie (2007) terms the "postfeminist masquerade". Butler (2013) explains that such a masquerade foregrounds personal choice where freethinking, contemporary women perform gender in

specific and intentional ways. McRobbie (2007: 723) adds, however, that these performances end up re-securing patriarchy in numerous ways. She contends that,

> the masquerade exists as mode of feminine inscription, an interpellative device, at work and highly visibly across the commercial domain as familiar (even nostalgic), light hearted (unserious), refrain of femininity. It has recently been re-instated into the repertoire of femininity ironically. This signals that the hyper femininity of the masquerade which would seemingly re-locate women back inside the terms of traditional gender hierarchies, by having her wear spindly stilettos and 'pencil' skirts does not in fact mean entrapment since it is now a matter of choice rather than obligation (McRobbie 2007: 723).

Thus, as a result of the complexities that emerge when grappling with postfeminism, Gill (2007) suggests that it is best to understand postfeminism as a "sensibility". Gill argues that seeing postfeminism as a sensibility is important because it "emphasizes the contradictory nature of postfeminist discourses and the entanglement of both feminist and anti-feminist themes within them" (2007: 149). In drawing links to the media's role in a postfeminist context, Maharajh (2014) explains that Gill formulated the idea of a postfeminist sensibility as a result of various, regular observations she made about the way in which gender played out in media content. Furthermore, as a theoretical tool, the postfeminist sensibility spells out features of a postfeminist culture in ways that are beneficial for research analysis (Butler 2013).

Gill (2007) explains that a postfeminist sensibility indicates the irrelevance of feminism due to the fact that gender equality has been achieved. As a result of this equality, emphasis is placed on agency, empowerment, individual choice and the promotion of consumption (Butler 2013: 44). Additionally, there is a clear school of thought that now understands and explains femininity as a bodily property that leads to a natural sexual difference between men and women (Maharajh 2014:681). There is thus also an increased promotion of "self-surveillance, self-discipline, and a makeover paradigm" (Butler 2013: 44). Consequently, the objectification of women has now shifted to a process of subjectification that has led to an increased sexualisation of everyday culture (Maharajh 2014). All these factors together make up what Gill terms a postfeminist sensibility.

In considering this from a feminist perspective, one would not be mistaken to assume that the strength of feminism and the feminist movement has faltered slightly. This is as a result of the way in which the mainstream has co-opted feminist discourse in ways that re-secure the patriarchal status quo (Press 2011). Despite women experiencing a lot more freedom today than they did in the past, the relativity of this freedom needs to constantly be remembered. Coming from a past where women were undoubtedly considered inferior to men meant that women were offered zero power socially, culturally, economically and so on. Relative to that, it is understandable why some feel that as a whole we have made strides in the right direction. However, this does not mean sexism and gender inequality do not exist. Press (2011: 109) argues, "… we live in the paradoxical cultural moment characterized by an only partial incorporation of feminist gains". The need for feminism is, therefore, still clear. Walter (1998: 03) rightly argues that,

> feminism is still here, right at the centre of these new lives. Because besides women's freedom lies another truth: the truth of their continuing inequality. The constraints that operate upon women are still fierce, and those constraints can come as a terrible shock to those insouciant young women as they move out of school and into their adult lives.

More importantly, Ahmed (2017: 15) emphasises that feminism "is not something we can put down. Feminism goes wherever we go. If not, we are not".

## *2.2 Feminism*

It is in this regard that Butler (2013) notes that while there has never been a standardised feminism, the collective intention has been to fight male dominance, end female subordination and question the status quo. Building on this, hooks (2000: 01) explains, "simply put, feminism is a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression". Ahmed (2017) thus explains that as a result of patriarchy, women are made to feel unwelcome in society. This inequality is entrenched to such an extent that it is imposed on women from birth. As part of understanding this process, Ahmed (2017: 25) engages Butler in calling this "girling". She argues that this process posits,

> …because you are a girl, we can do this to you. Violence too is a mode of address. Being a girl is a way of being taught what it is to have a body: you are being told; you will receive my advances; you are object; thing, nothing. To become girl is to learn to expect such advances, to modify your behaviour in accordance; to become girl as

> becoming wary of being in public space; becoming wary of being at all. Indeed, if you do not modify your behaviour in accordance, if you are not careful and cautious, you can be made responsible for the violence directed toward you… (Ahmed 2017: 26).

Ahmed specifically describes this inequality and injustice through the analogy of women being made to feel as though they are not at home in this world and, therefore, argues that feminism is housework or homework. Intentionally raising it so closely to the personal, Ahmed argues that "feminist housework aims to transform the house, to rebuild the master's residence" (2017: 07). Drawing on scholarship about African American histories of slavery and ownership, Ahmed's reference to the master's residence is compelling, as it also attaches racial domination to considerations of power and patriarchy.

In turn, the feminist movement also became a space where women confronted issues of class, race and privilege. In this regard, feminism is often understood in waves. Earlier waves tended to preference the plight of white women. Through the feminist movement's history, attempts were made and continue to be made to counter this, working towards a more inclusive feminism. However, in addition to this, a significant tension that emerged within the movement was the tension between feminism and femininity. This tension remains a central issue in this project. This tension stems from what is known as the second wave of feminism, with Friedan (1963: 01) explaining that,

> There was a strange discrepancy between the reality of our lives as women and the image to which we were trying to conform, the image that I came to call the feminine mystique.

Hence, Brunsdon (2005: 112) explains, "what second-wave feminism said was 'We're not like that' and that kind of femininity is impossible". This resulted in a scenario that rendered feminism and femininity as duelling, polar opposites.

Munford and Waters (2014) highlight the patriarchal mass media's role in this process, both in emphasising sexist feminine ideals while also antagonising the efforts of the feminist movement. As part of responding to these sexist ideals, hooks explains that the feminist rejection thereof "was a ritualistic, radical reclaiming of the health and glory of the female body" (hooks 2000: 31). Hooks further explains that while there were those feminists who actively rejected anything linked to the social construct of the feminine, most women

appreciated the choice. In particular, they preferred the choice between comfort and what was considered traditionally feminine (2000). However, in addition to threats of societal hegemony as a whole, these feminist interventions also had capitalistic implications for many large companies, especially those in the fashion and beauty industries. Resultantly, in response to these threats to hegemonic ideals, as well as profits of their advertisers, the patriarchal mass media worked to actively demonise and undermine the feminist movement. In an attempt to save their profit, these industries bought into these media narratives, such that "they put their money behind mass media campaigns which trivialized women's liberation by portraying images which suggested feminists were big, hypermasculine, and just plain old ugly" (hooks 2000: 32).

Despite this, the movement continued with the work it was doing to fight patriarchy. However, through these glimpses of success, tension emerged in the movement when considering ways forward, particularly in relation to issues of sexuality. Linking more broadly to the feminist stance on pornography, disagreements arose as a result of some feminists who argued against pornography and for the protection of women against sexual objectification (Butler: 2013). Others argued that such an approach was stifling, arguing for sexual liberation instead. They felt that women should not allow themselves to be victimised by objectification but rather that feminist discourse should focus on issues of freedom and rights. Butler explains that what emerged was "a symbolic framework of protection versus liberation; anti-sex versus pro-sex; old versus new" (2013: 39). It is at this proverbial fork in the road that the second-wave of feminism began to end and new approaches emerged. The mainstream media stoked the flames of these tensions to further delegitimise these new movements as a whole. This is best understood as feminist backlash (Press 2011). Munford and waters (2014: 10) argue that,

> popular culture has become a site where nostalgic and highly stylized images of traditional femininity are endlessly reproduced. The re-enchantment and re-mystification of precisely those models of femininity that were investigated and debunked by second wave feminists suggests that popular culture is now appointed by a 'postfeminist mystique'.

As noted, what emerged were newer versions of feminism. While the original intention behind the emergence of the third-wave of feminism was to further normalise a more diverse

and inclusive feminist cause, this did not materialise (Hammer and Kellner 2009). Instead, one witnessed an increased prevalence in postfeminism.

Here, the emergence of postfeminism can be understood as a response to three broad issues. The first links to what Maharajh (2014) describes as a theoretical break from the second-wave as a result of its exclusion of feminists who were not white, middle class citizens of the west. In arguing that lived experience was not global, these feminists called for a new, more inclusive alternate feminism, understood by some as the emergence of the third-wave (Butler: 2013). While third-wave feminism and postfeminism are often conflated, a distinction is important to properly acknowledge the exclusivity of the second-wave. Butler writes,

> There are important similarities between third-wave feminism and post-feminism. Both terms can be used to signal an epistemological break that challenges the dominance of Anglo-American feminism and to denote a time 'after' a particular moment in feminist history (2013: 42).

Links can also be drawn here to the second issue in relation to the emergence of postfeminism. The emergence of postfeminism is attributed to the pastness of second-wave feminism, where it is suggested that the relevance of feminism has passed (Maharajh 2014). Butler (2013) reiterates this point in noting that, where third-wave feminism acknowledges feminist history as lacking, postfeminism acts as a replacement of feminism, the common-sense next step in the discussion. The view is that feminism has achieved what it needed to and is no longer required. "In this regard, postfeminism is not only viewed as a chronological phase, but also as a new moment of feminist activity, complete with new challenges and concerns" (Maharajh 2014: 681).

This gives rise to the third issue that the emergence of postfeminism addresses. With the argument of the pastness of feminism came feminist backlash too. Engaging with Faludi's work, Barger (2011) says that those who subscribed to this new approach felt that equality had been achieved and in fact women faced new challenges in life that feminism could not address. Butler (2013: 42) builds on this, noting that "postfeminism not only declares feminism over, but also accuses feminism of spawning an entire generation of miserable, burned-out, confused women". Maharajh (2014) describes such backlash as anti-feminist. It is in this regard that Brunsdon (2005: 112) explains that, "the debates about feminism and

postfeminism circle around questions of generation, periodization, and the validity and national specificity of notions of 'backlash.'"

## *2.3 A more global postfeminism*

While such a sensibility is a useful analytical tool in contemporary times, one would be remiss not to recognise that theoretical discussions around postfeminism often ignore issues of location, race, class and sexuality. Butler (2013: 47) argues, "most of the academic literature on postfeminism examines cultural representations featuring women who are young, hetero-sexual, middle-class, and white". Butler further suggests that such exclusions intentionally occur to properly ensure white male domination in society. This as a result of the static and default assumption that the face of the male oppressor who oppress these white women is also white. What this does is secures white men in a position of power. Such a narrative is in line with the marking of whiteness as so inherent that it becomes worldly (Ahmed: 2007). Regarding this inherence, Ahmed argues that, "reification is not then something we do to whiteness, but something whiteness does, or to be more precise, what allows whiteness to be done" (2007: 150). This in turn enables a power dynamic that renders whiteness as the most powerful. Ahmed notes that historically this power was expressed and maintained through the likes of colonialism. The long standing after-effects of colonialism leaves a world with an experience of white domination such that it is understood as the norm. Importantly, this extends beyond the political and economic, manifesting in the social and cultural realm as well. Memory of this dominance is internalised with little question as the inherence is seen as the norm. This in turn structures the world in ways that suit whiteness, even if it is no longer actively dominating people of colour through the brute force of colonialism. Ahmed explains this by describing whiteness as "an ongoing and unfinished history, which orientates bodies in specific directions, affecting how they 'take up' space" (2007: 150).

Based on this, it makes sense how a theory like postfeminism theorises the lived experience of white women in contemporary times by default, as whiteness is understood as the focal point from which the world is understood. In the context of theoretical discussions that do this, a lot of this can be attributed to what Ahmed describes as the historical whiteness of academia. She argues that "…spaces acquire the shape of the bodies that 'inhabit' them" (2007: 156). From this, one is able to understand why such a default assumption exists.

However, in a globalised context such as today this is not adequate. Such an argument is less about dismissing the study of white women's lives and more about the realisation that this should not be the only perspective from which to make sense of the world. In relation to gender, this is especially important because as Yan and Bissell (2014: 195) point out, "as western media content permeates societies and cultures worldwide the globalization of a beauty and appearance ideal is gaining prevalence in non-western as well as western societies". It is in this regard that one should actively and unashamedly work to demonstrate the relevance of postfeminism in other more diverse contexts. Butler thus argues that postfeminist theory needs to be more intersectional. Richardson and Munro (2012: 41) explain intersectionality as an awareness that societal inequality does not exist in neat categories. Rather, a variety of inequalities based on gender, race, class, sexuality, ethnicity, age, etc. are regularly intersecting, thereby complicating the ways in which inequality is understood. An acknowledgment of these intersections is required to properly address issues of inequality (Richardson & Munro 2012).

Building on this, Dosekun (2015) engages with Butler's argument about the exclusivity of postfeminism and supports the problematising of the same. Her issue, however, is the way in which Butler fails to address the exclusion of non-western women within postfeminist literature as part of problematising this exclusivity. It is not unimaginable to see the relevance of postfeminism in contexts outside of the global north. Work specifically on popular cultural contexts in spaces like Africa and India demonstrate this. In addition to this project, Dosekun's (2015) work on modern femininity in Lagos, Nigeria, speaks directly to this. Dosekun, therefore, argues for a "transnational approach to post-feminism" in an attempt to highlight "the possibility and value of reconceptualising post-feminism as a transnational culture" (2015: 02). This can be further justified through the work of Bhabha (1994), who notes that through the legacies of colonialism, cultural representation and cultural power are skewed. As a result of this bias in favour of those with colonial capital, Bhabha recognises the need for a change in understanding how culture is understood. He, therefore, defines culture as both transnational and translational.

Such an approach is key. Works that fail to acknowledge the different lived experiences of people of colour around the world when theorising contemporary life are fundamentally flawed. Spencer et al. (2018:04) add to this explaining that it is crucial to recognise this and

"…undo ways of reading terrains of gender and sexuality that remain stuck in archaic formulations or that cannot escape the rigid frameworks within which they have always been placed". Butler and Desai (2008) argue that by theorising in such depoliticised and sterile ways, these works ignore the complexities of life in totality. By doing this, they argue that academics emphasise the focus on white women as the focal point from which femininity and feminism is understood. Furthermore, they suggest that the general assumption is that the broader relevance of these white narratives simply transcend issues of difference and are easily applicable to more diverse examples and contexts. It also renders more diverse spaces as secondary to whiteness, understanding feminism in these spaces as "…white feminism's little sister, one that simply repeats the errors of her older sibling" (2008: 06). Navigating difference so simply is not just problematic but also inadequate. In a postcolonial context for example, the postcoloniality of the space directly impacts the lived experience of the people in that space. The lived experiences in these spaces directly influence how socio-cultural issues like gender actually emerge in a context. Runkle (2004: 147) thereby notes that "what it means to be a woman in South Asia, for example, is very different from the articulations of gender in the United States". Oza (2016) thus argues that central to what is understood as transnational feminism is the issue of difference.

In light of this, we can begin to understand postfeminism as a global discourse. Dosekun (2015) thereby asserts that in reality, a transnational approach to postfeminism is easily achievable based on the mediated, neoliberal nature of both postfeminism and the world today. She asserts that such a transnational approach is achievable via "de-centering post-feminism from the West, that is not thinking of it as uniquely or authentically Western culture such that we already see it as impossible or imitative elsewhere" (2015: 05). Central to the success of such a premise is the acknowledgment of class. Dosekun (2015) is emphatic that she does not mean that the manifestations of postfeminist practice throughout the world are uniform and holistically applicable. She argues, "my contention is that post-feminism is potentially and variously available to globally 'scattered' feminine subjects who have material, discursive, and imaginative capital to access and to buy into it" (2015: 07). This links directly to the issue of class. While not all women in the global south engage in postfeminist practise, there are definitely those that do according to the class-based stratification of society.

Dosekun (2015: 09) explains that "an understanding of post-feminism as a culture put into transnational circulation includes the understanding that the culture does not travel or arrive in a unitary or prototypical Western form". Existing cultures and moral codes within the global south further shape the nature of this manifestation. Where postfeminist practice emerges, it is likely to do so within existing moral and ideological frameworks of that specific country.

Demonstrating these frameworks via the example of Zimbabwe, Mupotsa (2008: 15) uses Mudimbe's work to explain that,

> it is 'because of the colonizing structure, [that] a dichotomizing system has emerged, and with it a number of current paradigmatic oppositions have developed: tradition versus contemporaryity; oral versus written and printed; agrarian and customary communities versus urban and industrialized civilisations; subsistence economies versus highly productive economies.' If we examine the process of colonization, urbanization and the post-independence development of urban areas in Zimbabwe, one sees how these dichotomies emerge and also how they inform the discourses on femininity and masculinity.

Though unique to the Zimbabwean context, the point Mupotsa makes about the complexities and nuances of spaces that were once colonised resonates even outside of the Zimbabwean space.

## *2.4 The Indian context*

Looking specifically at India, where the data for this project comes from, similar yet unique issues emerge. A crucial issue in this regard is caste. Singh et al. (2019: 03) define caste and the caste system in India as "…a longstanding and evolving form of social stratification and an institutionalized system of 'domination and exclusion' that structures opportunities and outcomes…". Building on this, this system is best understood in relation to the ways in which it hierarchises society such that certain groups of people in society are othered and discriminated against based purely on the family they were born into (Singh 2008). Trivedi (2007: 60) explains that it is "one of the oldest hierarchical systems in the world…". That as a result of the discrimination that it fosters, having a drastic impact on the lived experiences of those within the system. This is especially problematic for those belonging to lower castes.

Singh (2008) further elaborates that for many, being born into a lower caste likely meant that the trajectory of that person's life professionally, socially, culturally and economically was already decided. Bros (2014) builds on this in noting that these levels of discrimination and marginalisation impacted the psyche of those worst affected in this system. In addition to the already discussed effects of this system, the stigma that comes with belonging to lower classes often limited the participation these individuals could have in broader society. Bros thereby argues that, often this discrimination is internalised to form a "diminished self-image" (2014: 1426). As a result, this system has seen significant inquiry, with the intention of gaining a better understanding of how it operates.

Jodhka (2016) explains that often emerging from this inquiry is a western-centric understanding of these issues. He explains,

> The popular textbook view of caste tends to approach it almost purely in cultural terms, a uniquely Indian practice that distinguished the traditional way of life of the region from the modern West and its cultural moorings (2016: 228).

Additionally, attempts were often made to link the issue of caste to other societal issues like race, class and gender as part of gaining a better understanding. However, clear distinctions can be made. Singh (2008), for example, explains that in actuality caste and race are markedly different for a number of reasons. These include the fact that,

> …while race is a product of capitalism-colonialism. Related to that is another distinction: while the caste system is a feature of an Indian – albeit Hindu – social order, race, a product of capitalism-colonialism, is global. Race, as noted by Gupta, is phenotypical on the surface, caste is not. (2008:125)

However, the relationship between caste, class and gender is more complex. Trivedi (2007) explains that these three issues together work hand in hand to amplify the overall influence they have on society. The impact of the limitations of caste for example have a snowball effect relating to issues of class and gender. Deshpande (2002: 24) expands on this explaining that "…the caste system not only determines the social division of labor but its sexual division as well". Singh et al. (2019) thereby argue that the coming together of these issues collectively and tangibly impact a person's life and successes. This could be positively for wealthy, upper caste men while meaning the complete opposite for poor, Dalit women. Jodhka (2016) thereby notes that many social scientists predicted the dismantling of the caste

system in India with the advent of modernisation, industrialisation and urbanisation. The impact of globalisation was assumed to be one that resulted in Indian societies adopting more equal stances on these issues. The reality, however, is that despite the advent of these different movements, caste remains an issue in Indian society today (Bros 2014). What is witnessed in the literature despite contradicting observations about the same, is that the impact of caste in urban centres in India are seemingly less oppressive.

Narzary and Ladusingh (2019) attribute this to the pervasiveness of the caste system in India today being primarily limited to rural areas. Bros (2014) adds to this in explaining that as a result of it being hard to establish a person's caste from their physical attributes alone, many believe that in urban centres, caste becomes less of an issue. Pankaj (2007: 345) thereby engages the work of Sheth, who attributes all of this to the "new middle class" in India. Those that subscribe to this view argue that within this new middle class, importance is given to issues of education, jobs and the buying and spending power that comes with the position, as compared to historical inequalities. He explains,

> This new middle class, recruited from various castes, develops distinct characteristics in terms of ritual detachment, acquisition of identity or consciousness of belonging to the middle class and convergence of their economic and political interests with other members of the middle class rather than their caste fellows. Thus, the new middle class is becoming politically and culturally more unified, though socially much more diversified (Pankaj 2007: 345).

The true extent to these assertions remains untested, primarily because the lived experiences of many in India remain impacted by caste. While in a neoliberal context, there are those that are able to venture out, study further, get better jobs and so on, the overall room to move upwards remains limited for many (Bros 2014). Ultimately, the continued realities and impact of class are less about academic postulations and predictions, and more about what the individual experiences on the ground. Singh et al. (2019: 04) thus add to this in explaining that, "While some extreme indignities related to caste may be less prevalent in cities, caste-based discrimination continues, often taking on new forms".

So, while Narzary and Ladusingh (2019) raise the point of the role, responsibility and impact of the mainstream media as one of the factors in society that can normalise caste differences, the reality of this hope says otherwise. Deshpande (2002), therefore, argues that, even if the media were to normalise these issues, individuals most negatively impacted by caste are often

unable to engage this content based on location and affordability. Furthermore, despite the idealistic expectation of the media, the mainstream popular media often ignore or overlook these issues. This is especially a critique of Bollywood cinema and the accompanying media. This is demonstrated through the 2018 Bollywood film *Dhadak*, a remake of popular Marathi film *Sairat*, about inter-caste love and honour killings. One of the biggest criticisms of the Bollywood remake was the way in which it completely ignored the role of caste in the film. Vetticad (2018a) argues,

> *Dhadak* (Heartbeat) seems to have completely missed the point of its source material…Why bother to make a film about an inter-caste romance if you are afraid to discuss caste? It is almost bizarre but true that when *Dhadak*'s finale is past, you realise that this shameful Indian reality was the elephant in the room Khaitan[9] did not address, as though by doing so his candyfloss and popcorn would acquire a bitter taste…*Dhadak*'s trepidation – or is it apathy – is in keeping with the attitude of post-1980s Bollywood, in which filmmakers have virtually ignored the existence of India's lower castes.

While Bollywood is not the only popular media in India, its reach is arguably one of the farthest. The fact that it often ignores caste as an important issue likely links to the way in which it deeply resonates with the middle class, thereby hoping to shape this new middle class in the way that Pankaj (2007) described it. Furthermore, this articulation of an urban middle class was not limited to the issue of caste alone. It also emerges with the way in which contemporary femininity is understood in the urban Indian context.

As part of mapping this femininity, it is important to begin by locating it historically. Much like McRobbie's 1978 work on *Jackie* magazine that located how gender was understood in England at the time, Krishna and Da Silva (2015) also did work on magazines and femininity in India. Their paper looked specifically at gender constructions in *Filmindia* between 1946 and 1948. This was a leading English magazine that was published between 1935 and 1961 (2015). Through their analysis, they were able to conclude that traditional understandings of femininity were very limiting for Indian women. An Indian woman, they argue, is primarily understood in relation to the men in her life: first her father and brothers and then her

[9] The film's director

husband and sons. Krishna and Da Silva argue that these understandings aligned with what they term the Gandhian notions of gender that dominated that period (2015). Women were firmly located within the domestic, and leaving home (for work, education etc.) was always understood in relation to how this helped others around them. The feminine purpose was to serve the men around them and society at large, if they chose to leave the house.

An interesting polarity that emerged, was in relation to a simmering tension between Indian and western ideals. Within *Filmindia,* western ideals were clearly depicted as the antithesis of what an Indian woman stood for. Indian men were encouraged to embrace the west for their careers but the same did not extend to Indian women. Indian femininity was understood within the realms of tradition and patriotism that located these women as someone who is "kept on a higher moral pedestal on account of her virtues like modesty and chastity" (Krishna and Da Silva 2015: 192). Contrasting discourses around modern and traditional, global and local, and men and women were clear. In one instance, this morality was placed in direct contrast to the west on the topic of kissing. The editor of the magazine, B. Patel, wrote,

> The West is a materialistic world in which concrete exchanges have to be indulged in even to establish emotional values. The Western love has to be seen before it is believed. Kissing in the West is a noisy and visible gesture, fashioned in their usual materialistic strain, to prove even to the blind that love has been delivered on both sides. In the East, love is an abstract spiritual emotion which is often difficult to discover even in the tearful eyes of the beloved. Women in our country consider it vulgar to even bring their heart into their eyes to prove they love their man. Theirs is a silent secretive and spiritual emotion. When Indian women love, they worship, they don't indulge in noisy kisses (Krishna and Da Silva 2015: 192).

Such a statement does not just locate the aforementioned contrast but also reiterates gender hierarchies through words like 'worship' when talking about how an Indian woman relates to her male partner. The gender dynamics were thus clearly and firmly located within patriarchal hierarchies that the mainstream media emphasised and maintained.

As time progressed, however, globalisation became an increasing reality around the world and in order to prosper India was required to acknowledge it. By 1991 India opened its economy in response to globalisation (Mitchell 2016). Runkle (2004) notes that this economic liberalisation marked a major turning point both for India and its people. In

understanding this liberalisation as a form of neoliberalism, one is able to better understand the nature of the changes Runkle alludes to. Butler and Desai (2008: 08) explain that through neoliberalism one is able to,

> interrogate the binaries that work to separate public from private, personal from political, consumption from production, and the cultural from the economic, attending instead to the ways in which such categories are mutually constituted.

Furthermore, consumerism and choice emerge as major factors to consider in a neoliberal context. These issues were heightened with the growing presence of the global media in India in this period. Kumar and Curtin (2002) note that the emergence and popularity of satellite television is often highlighted as one of the major contributing factors in relation to the changes in India post-liberalisation. Through the media, India also saw the emergence of a culture that is a lot more conscious consumption and beauty specifically (Parameswaran 2004). Thapan (2004: 414) thereby suggests that "a new global media provides the symbols, myths, resources, ideas and images for the construction of a common culture as well as of individual identities".

What emerged was a new way of life for many in India. Baghel et al. (2014: 164) describe this new life as a "...new cosmopolitan public culture in which conspicuous consumption became one of the strategies for common people to aspire to a better life". The idea of having more became an issue of aspiration for many. Kumar and Curtin (2002) point out that more and more the luxurious life often seen in Bollywood cinema was within reach for an emerging Indian middle-class. Thapan (2004: 414) notes that this emerging urban Indian elite were able to encounter "the non-traditional (contemporary), liberated (westernised) and 'trendy' (modern) aspects of everyday life". Moorti (2010) notes that it is this emergent middle class that contributes greatly to India's economic growth. She also notes that despite this, very little research is done about the Indian middle class. What is, however, clear is that despite their emergence and growth in Indian society, the tensions between the polarity between Indian and western were all the more heightened post economic liberalisation (Reddy 2006). Reddy further explains that "…the crucial project for nation-states like India, is to negotiate the desire for and participation in the accumulation of global capital with the preservation of national identity" (2006: 62).

Based on the earlier realisation that Indian femininity is closely tied to Indian culture and tradition, it is, therefore, not surprising that issues of gender emerged as a key marker of how India grew to navigate the global versus local tensions that the economic liberalisation brought about. This was done primarily through conversations about the six women who won the Miss World or Miss Universe competition as Miss India. Their success on a global platform served very symbolic purposes for India as a country, especially considering the first victories for India at these pageants occurred in 1994, soon after the country's economic liberalisation. Parameswaran (2004) thus explains that these women came to serve as a metaphor for India as they entered the global arena as a result of globalisation and the opening of their markets. With the glamor that has come to be associated with these pageants, particularly the global pageants, these women also served as a lingua franca on how to navigate the potential of the new consumerism that was now made available as a result of the liberalisation. The success of these women in particular were aspirational for the country's anxiety in relation to finding a balance between the global and the local. They serve as an example of how embracing globalisation can be done in ways that are not at the expense of local cultures and traditions (Parameswaran 2004). Runkle (2004: 156) thereby suggests that the women competing in the Miss India pageant were "playing nationhood" and "performing India". Through media coverage, primarily in glossy woman's magazine *Femina*, (also a sponsor of the Miss India pageant) that targeted middle class Indian women through its English content, much analysis emerged around this metaphoric representation and what it meant for the country, as well as contemporary Indian femininity.

Importantly, in response to the diverse nature of Indian society, the representation of these women (in the mainstream media as a whole) was carefully constructed to ensure that it resonated with as wide an audience as possible. Reddy (2006: 63) explains that the ideal Indianness that emerged was one that saw "the erasure of class, caste and religious differences". This Indianness was meant to be understood as unifying and exemplary rather than divisive. As such, focus was on other issues that served the purpose of the representation. This is demonstrated by the ways in which emphasis is placed on the hard work these women put into their journey, as well as a rags to riches type story. Even if they did not specifically come from dire poverty, they were presented as someone who was once "a struggling individual who through working hard manages to scale the ladder of class mobility to become a national hero" (Parameswaran 2005: 422), thereby overcoming this

through hard work. Examples of these challenges include bullying, struggling to speak English, being overweight, being too dark skinned and being lower middle-class.

As exemplars of success, one of the most crucial elements of what these women represent in their Indianness is their Indianness itself. As Reddy (2006: 67) explains, these women's

> nationality and globality-both of which constitute Indianess- depend, in part, on measuring and denying any trace of 'the West' in her bodily makeup. The West in *Femina* is discursively constructed as a place of colonialism, modernity and artificiality, one that is always in dialectic with these discursive constructions within notions 'Indianness,' as well.

Much like the older understandings of femininity in the era of *Filmindia,* women today are still understood in relation to culture and tradition. These women who represent India on a global stage can alter minor features about themselves like fashion and beauty, however, at their core their Indianness should never falter. The Indianness of these women is emphasised in a variety of ways. These include regularly discussing their family and closeness to their family, as it suggests that family is very important to Indian people. Therefore, a lot of coverage is given to these women's family lives both before and after their victories, highlighting in particular how they support and uplift their families (Parameswaran 2004).

However, beyond the family, a very specific way in which their Indianness is emphasised is in relation to how this Indianness equipped them with the advantage they needed in these global competitions. As Parameswaran (2005: 424) describes that, despite using

> …the gym like their Western counterparts, it was their deep immersion in Indian's ancient practices of holistic healing-yoga, chanting of hymns, and nutrition based in grains and nuts-that gave them inner strength and willpower.

In this way, emphasis is placed on how these women stay true to who they are despite their global success. Similarly, the implication is that if India and other Indians maintain the same level of balance, they too will see success.

This issue of aspiration is especially important as part of normalising the narratives found within these media texts. Baghel et al. (2014: 171) thus point out that like Bollywood actors and actresses, the women that win these pageants serve as "idealized models that provide an aspirational horizon for comparison and transformation". In particular, importance is given to

the Indian middle class, based on their new found buying power and ability to engage the globe as Indians, as a result of economic liberalisation in the country. Adding to this, Parameswaran (2005) argues that the hope is that by engaging with media content about these women, the middle classes believe that they too will achieve as much as the beauty queens have, while still staying true to their Indianness. This is especially important considering the ways in which nationhood, tradition and culture worked to control women in earlier media content. The risk of the influence of contemporary westernisation is directly countered through patriotic discourse that encourages tradition. Despite this, media content does not articulate such performances of femininity as limiting, old fashioned or oppressive. Rather, these beauty queens serve as an embodiment of women that navigate these terrains with aplomb. Reddy (2006: 67) thus explains that media platforms like *Femina* try to:

> 'resolve' the contradiction between a grass roots feminism committed to social change and a liberal feminism that is tied to a consumerist 'love of the beautiful' by invoking the iconic figure of the new Indian woman: the Indian beauty queen.

Knowingly or unknowingly these six winning beauty queens thus came to serve as both the catalyst and the solution in the discussion around what it meant to be a woman in contemporary India. Basu (2001) thereby notes that through the Indian media, the new Indian woman also came to stand as an eclectic mix of modern and traditional. Much of this tension between modern and traditional manifests geographically as tension between India and the west, as the new Indian woman is located as a global subject (Reddy 2006). She is someone that becomes the surface for these tensions to play out on. Reddy (2006: 77) thereby describes her as someone who is "highly mobile, slipping in and out of boundaries of 'home' and 'the world,' appropriating 'Indianness' and 'Westernness' in contradictory ways." The mobility afforded to the new Indian woman, therefore, suggests that she is middle class, with the potential to do more than other women, and thereby gain wealth. Thapan (2004: 440) notes in her work on representations of contemporary Indian femininity via *Femina* magazine that,

> the middle or upper-class urban Indian woman addressed in these visual representations is projected as educated, upwardly-mobile, status conscious, economically independent, capable of taking decisions for the family, 'modern', urban, and consciously middle class. Most importantly, she has the economic capacity

to consume the beauty, personal care and household products advertised in the magazine.

These women can, therefore, afford to exist both globally and locally. Key to this mobility, however, is an acute awareness of their national identity. The new Indian woman's patriotism should never falter (Parameswaran: 2004). Despite this, Reddy (2006) notes that based on the expectations placed on these women, being Indian alone is not enough. Parameswaran (2004:362) describes the new Indian woman as a "hybrid global-national.". Within this hybridity, however, media representations make it clear that new Indian femininity is not about assimilating to whiteness (Basu 2001). Rather, it is reflective on the image of a white woman and like the beauty queens, uses Indian morals, ethics and traditions to better that image. In so doing, it is suggested that she stands as the best version of Indian womanhood that has existed (2001).

In spite of this, new Indian femininity is still firmly located within patriarchal frameworks. As noted previously, in the Indian context, this is justified through tradition. Media representations of this new femininity, therefore, highlights the symbolic nature of much of its existence. Reddy (2006) explains that womanhood is seen in the context of concurrent markers of sacrifice and growth. Locating Indian femininity within these two forced parallels is intended to ensure that a balance is found in gender performance between the modern and the traditional. Basu (2001: 182) notes that "the onus for coping and following prescriptive gendered behaviors is placed on the woman". She may have the freedom of choice in a globalised context, but her Indianness serves as an anchor amidst threats of westernised possibility that offers unhinged "freedom and liberation" (Thapan 2004: 441). This emphasis on Indianness is also seemingly a response to the western world's warped understanding of wanting to *save* the perceived other as part of extending western norms and practices as global norms and practices. As a result of this, Parameswaran (2004: 351) describes gender performance for the new Indian woman as a balance between "femininity/feminism, and conformity/liberation". So, while these women are able to engage with issues of consumption, mobility and so on outside of the domestic, they should still locate themselves within the domestic, even if only partly (but ideally more than partly). Basu (2001: 184) notes that despite the mobility and *freedom* afforded to these women, they "continue to be seen as sacred markers of culture". Through engaging with Hegde's work on *Femina*, Basu explains that in spite of the acknowledged geographic hybridity that gives rise to middle class women

that are consumers, some of whom who have careers, marriage is presented as the most desirable choice for a modern Indian woman. Thapan (2004) argues that womanhood and tradition are intrinsically tied together in ways that suggest this is not just important as a gender issue but also as a national issue. She elaborates that this in turn marks "Indian womanhood as the embodiment of respectability and national honour that must be preserved at all costs" (2004: 442). Reddy (2006: 71) thus observes that through this, tradition is understood and presented "not as an obsolete and oppressive set of practices to be remedied by colonization, but as *a timeless* and *spiritual* set of practices in which India was superior".

Thapan (2004: 415) further argues that what emerges is an understanding of new Indian femininity and the new Indian woman as a woman that:

> …is an ambivalent entity shaped by the social and public domain which simultaneously portrays her as glamorous, independent, conscious of her embodiment and of the many forms of adornment and self-presentation available to her, and yet enshrined in the world of tradition through her adherence to family and national values.

Here, one is able to begin making links to new Indian femininities and postfeminism. In a globalised context, as considered above, the postfeminist performance of gender is one that can be understood as transnational. However, in India, the tensions between western influence and Indian tradition make the boundaries of such gender performance very clear. Where globalisation led to the emergence of a consumer driven beauty culture in India, emphasis is still placed on the Indianness of these manifestations. Beauty practices were now seen as increasingly popular, especially those that incorporate traditional Indian remedies into their practices (Baghel et al. 2014). Reddy (2006) explains that the new Indian woman's beauty is understood as a direct contrast to the beauty of western women, where Indian women and their features emerge superior. Through her work on *Femina* magazine, Reddy observed that discourse in the magazine suggests,

> 'Western' beauty here lacks what Indian beauty has and, therefore, must compensate for this 'lack' through artificial means, plastic surgery. Indian beauty is once again naturalised, this time through and against artificial Western beauty (2006: 74).

Nonetheless, the established narrative suggests that maintaining this beauty entails work. Baghel et al. (2014) note that since the economic liberalisation, the focus on appearance has

grown exponentially. The use of beauty parlours and salons grew not just in response to this postfeminist need to look good, but also to demonstrate and perform one's class and show what it affords the individual. Baghel et al. argue that often these visits to the salon and beauty parlour are justified as a response to the demands of modern life (2014). However, they are also able to establish aspiration, where people are now able to actively seek to look like their favourite beauty queens and Bollywood stars. This reiterates the role of not just the six beauty queens but also Bollywood stars as celebrities in the media who are presented in ways that assist the general Indian public with making sense of contemporary India. While much of the focus of existing work is on the six beauty queens specifically, post that period it can be argued that it was Bollywood stars who continued to assist audiences with these navigations of contemporary gender performance and this project works to demonstrate this further.

A key issue relating to this that has come to the fore in more recent (postfeminist) times, revolved around Indian womanhood and sexuality. Within this space, sexuality and Indian womanhood was only linked in the private domain, hardly ever discussed in public, thereby extending the narratives of chastity seen in *Filmindia* in the 1940s (Krishna and Da Silva: 2015). As such, one of the biggest perceived threats of westernisation via globalisation in many contexts is the assumption of an increases sexualisation of the local culture. Based on the existing anxiety and tension between Indian culture and the west, mainstream responses to the new Indian woman and her sexuality were marked. These responses spoke not just to issues of gender and geography but also issues of class. Basu (2001: 184) explains that,

> active sexual engagement is associated with Western women (spectres include the so-called sexual revolution and lesbian feminism), low-class women (whose language and sexual practices are not seen as being modest), and elite women (who are out and about in high society and business and may be morally lax).

By also demonising sexuality via class and nationhood in order to ensure that such a narrative really resonated, one is able to note the threat that issues of sexuality seem to present. However, in an increasingly postfeminist era, demonising sexuality as a whole ended up as being too moralistic. As such, focus was placed specifically on explicit sexuality. Everyday sexiness anchored by the morals and traditions of Indianness slowly grew more acceptable. Reddy (2006: 66) explains that the new Indian woman, "…can understand herself as an *erotic*

subject: while not explicitly sexual in nature, her investment in her appearance is aimed at fulfilling her *own* bodily and psychic pleasures". What Reddy demonstrates here is the exact boundaries within which postfeminism in India can operate. It is likely not as sexually explicit as western manifestations, but nonetheless through the guise of empowerment and agency, re-centres patriarchal thought and practise.

## *2.5 Gender and affect*

As part of making sense of mainstream media representations of gender and femininity, the project found it useful to engage the area of affect. In noting the patriarchal nature of society and the ways in which feminism attempts to fight this, one quickly realises how entrenched and naturalised this way of thinking actually is in society today. It is because of this entrenchment that many underestimate the damaging impact and influence such unjust power tends to have. De Certeau (1988), therefore, explains the importance of politicising the everyday. Demonstrating this, Ahmed (2017: 43) argues that,

> ...power works as a mode of directionality, a way of orientating bodies in particular ways, so they are facing a certain way, heading toward a future that is given a face. As you become aware of how the social world is organized, norms appear as palpable things.

Part of this organisation links to the ideas of affect. Gregg and Seigworth (2010: 01) explain affect as the,

> name we give to those forces—visceral forces beneath, alongside, or generally other than conscious knowing, vital forces insisting beyond emotion—that can serve to drive us toward movement, toward thought and extension, that can likewise suspend us (as if in neutral) across a barely registering accretion of force-relations, or that can even leave us overwhelmed by the world's apparent intractability. Indeed, affect is persistent proof of a body's never less than ongoing immersion in and among the world's obstinacies and rhythms, its refusals as much as its invitations.

Ahmed (2010) builds on this, describing the study of affect as the link to how bodies make sense of the world. Through this process, objects and thoughts gain a value that is able to shape our everyday experience. In particular, the study of affect focuses on how emotions and feelings assist in making meaning of the world which assists greatly in understanding the

complexities and dominance of patriarchal hegemonies. Here Ahmed (2004) highlights how, through language as the vehicle for emotion, a consent is manufactured through effecting bodies emotionally. Here, Ahmed argues that,

> emotions do things, and they align individuals with communities – or bodily space with social space – through the very intensity of their attachments. Rather than seeing emotions as psychological dispositions, we need to consider how they walk in concrete in particular ways, to mediate the relationship between the psychic and social, and between the individual and the collective (2004: 119).

In these ways, meaning is naturalised. What resultantly emerges here is the idea that, "emotions work as a form of capital: affect does not reside positively in the sign or commodity, but is produced only as an effect of its circulation" (Ahmed 2004: 120). Consequently, through manufacturing a detailed consensus in this way, affect becomes extremely effective in extending dominant ideologies in society. Ahmed (2010) emphasises the need to see affect as conditional (2010). She argues that while there are indeed dominant ways of thinking in society, if affect was so easily spread we would see little ideological dissent in society. Nonetheless, understanding how this affect manifests and works to create and maintain consensus is important when considering issues like gender representation in the media.

It is thus not surprising when Azzarito (2010: 261) explains that "contemporary media narratives about femininity play a powerful role in producing girls' understandings of themselves and construction of their bodies". Durham (1998: 369 cited in Nash 2002: 343) asserts such texts "play a strong symbolic role in constituting [girl's] subjectivities and identities" through a process of "training" the readers in line with gendered hegemonies. Kelkar and Gangave (2003a) build on this explaining how seemingly innocuous descriptions that attribute dimension to issues, objects and people can eventually move from being accidental or unintentional to dominant and fundamental. Merging this with the issue of dominant hegemony and the status quo, they explain,

> the need to characterize an individual in one particular way rather than another is rooted in the prevailing interests, perceived problems and anticipated solutions. An entire structure of values, norms and standards is constructed to guard those interests. The internalisation of these values through socialisation at times appears so complete

> that the perception of one's identity from within matches totally with its artificial construction from without (Kelkar & Gangave 2003b: 21).

Adding to this, Reay (2001) highlights the manner in which such representations are also influenced by hegemonies around class, race and sexuality. He engages Pyke who writes that these factors "provide additional layers of complication. They form the structural and cultural contexts in which gender is enacted in everyday life, thereby fragmenting gender into multiple masculinities and femininities" (Pyke 1996: 531 cited in Reay 2001: 163).

Consequently, with media production understood as maintaining a variety of interlinked hegemonies, when it comes to gender, Butler (2005: 22) explains how such a status quo is oppressive to women. She writes,

> What I can be quite literally is constrained in advance by a regime of truth which decides in advance what will and will not be a recognisable form of being…this does not mean that a given regime of truth sets the invariable framework of recognition: it means only that it is in relation to this framework that recognition takes place or the norms that govern recognition are challenged or transformed.

## *2.6 Celebrity culture and Bollywood*

Finally, while the project focuses on Bollywood actresses, the intention here is to specifically focus on the off screen work these women do as famous actresses. Bollywood is the vessel for this existence and so while not central to the theoretical framework of the project, it is important to understand how celebrity culture and an understanding of Bollywood informs the context of the broader work of the project relating to the ways Indian femininity(ies) plays out in popular culture spaces via these famous women. Stemming from Mumbai, India, Bollywood is a film industry that presents Hindi language films to the world. Chatterjee (2016: 1183) describes Bollywood as a "transnational media industry" and an "interesting amalgamation of disparate cultural trends". Building on this, Frank (2016) explains that as an industry, Bollywood produces about 1000 Hindi films every year. As a result, the industry is the largest producer of films globally, attracting a global audience larger than that of Hollywood (Srinivas 2010). Films from the west may generate more money due to the dominance of the dollar and established and far reaching international distribution networks (Crane 2014). However, Dwyer (2010) argues that the number of Bollywood films produced and the number of people that watch those films far exceed western film industries like

Hollywood, thereby making Bollywood one of the largest film industries globally. Adding to this, Barat (2018) explains that the largest markets of Bollywood are spread all across the world. Beyond India, the audience can be broken down as follows, "3.3 million in North America, 2.3 Million in the United Kingdom, 2.6 million in the Gulf States, and 1.1 million in South Africa as its biggest markets" (Barat 2018: 105). Vanarase (2003: 243) notes that "with the mass character of the medium, anything seen in the film reaches the eyes of an indefinitely large audience". It is for this reason that Ebrahim (2008) notes the large amounts of cultural capital that Bollywood holds in the globalized world of today. Dwyer (2010: 381) thus asserts that "Hindi cinema deserves our attention, not just as a form in itself but also as the best and most reliable guide to contemporary India". Adding to this, Osuri (2008: 110) explains,

> the transnational circulation of Bollywood, therefore, is not only about the itineraries of Hindi commercial films based in Mumbai, but also about the circulation and packaging of cultural forms associated with Bollywood.

Dwyer (2010) describes the films as texts that depict the aspirations of everyday Indian life. As a result, "the films themselves have a variable class reference" (Dwyer 2010: 384), where characters on screen come from all walks of life. She suggests that Bollywood film is influenced by the "fantasy, nostalgia and desire" of the Indian public (2010: 384). Despite this, Dwyer explains that the consumption of Bollywood film is very classed. Even though these films transcend boundaries of age and literacy, they have very strong and established production and consumption links to India's new middle class (Dwyer 2010). The significance of this observation resonates with the broader effort of the project to couple a transnational understanding of postfeminism with media texts about Bollywood actresses. Assisting in justifying this choice, Dwyer (2010: 383) argues that inspection into Bollywood

> helps us understand the spectator's involvement with films and their god-like stars as part of their role in contemporary India, in particular how they affect peoples' ideas of the self and their relationships to family, society and public life.

These Bollywood stars play a significant role both in Indian society and in societies globally that consume the films and the media texts about the industry. Marshall (2006: 01) explains that this is because, "Celebrity provides a surface through which contemporary culture

produces significance and a depth of investment in particular identities, moments and personalities". Thrift (2010: 305) adds to this in explaining that,

> The glamorous celebrity is neither person nor thing but something in between, an unobtainable reality, an imaginary friend, and an accessory, a mental image that can be conjured up in the imagination, explored, and made one's own, something that is at issue in the world.

Bollywood stars have grown to become "powerful ethno-cultural signifiers" in society today (Roy 2012: 13). Ciecko (2001) builds on this explaining that through an increased media presence Bollywood stars have become increasingly significant in ways that extend beyond just the work they do on the film screen. Mazumdar (2012) explains the contrast of the on and off screen lives of these stars is what contributes to both the glamorous perception of their lives, as well the audience's fascination thereof. Alberoni (2006) further notes that through increasing levels of fame and recognition, celebrities gain influence and ideological power.

The media's role in maintaining and extending this fame, recognition, influence and power is undeniable, with Gopinath (2017) noting that the celebrities depend on the media for relevance. This is primarily because the equation between celebrity and the audience is a mediated one (Bonner 2005). Furthermore, in this process it is the media that creates these celebrities. Thrift (2010) explains that through the media, the celebrity gains significance in the lives of audience members based on how their achievements are framed in relation to audience desire. The media, therefore, work hard to create and package these celebrities in very specific ways. Part of this work involves an awareness of the ideological politics of the time, as well as the anxieties people face in order to present material that resonates with the audience. Additionally, based on the media's role in the socialisation process, the ideals promoted or discouraged in their content about celebrities are presented in line with the hegemonic ideals of society.

Marshall (2006: 03) argues that "celebrities serve as the lingua franca of identity and, in some cases, identity politics in the contemporary scene". He further describes this equation between celebrity and the audience as an "ideological colonisation" (2006: 06). Barat (2018: 108) adds to this in describing the power celebrities have via the media texts about them, which he terms "soft power" that is able to "mould, influence, and eventually transform

people's feelings and perceptions about their self-being and the surroundings in which they thrive" Through the constant media texts about these celebrities, the audience's interest eventually becomes undeniable. Barat (2018) thus draws parallels between Bollywood stars and gods in the eyes of the audience. Bollywood audiences idolise these stars and place them on pedestals. He further explains, "such is the fan following of the stars that people will do anything (bordering on absurd and hysterical) to catch a glimpse of the 'demi-Gods'" (Barat 2018:107).

Consequently, Holmes and Redmond (2006) point out that audience admiration, simulation and identification of/with celebrities are core tenets of a sustainable celebrity system. Dyer (2006: 154) asserts,

> the general image of stardom can be seen as a version of the American dream, organized around the themes of consumption, success and ordinariness…In addition, love, marriage and sex are constants of the image.

As western centric as Dyer's point is, the broader argument that speaks to the micro levels at which this fascination operates is noteworthy. It is this detailed fascination that allows the celebrity's power of influence to be as far reaching as it is in the lives of the audience. Holmes and Redmond (2006: 03) note that the (imagined) relationship between the audience and the celebrity is "one of the most intimate and far-reaching forms of sociability in the contemporary world". They attribute this intimacy to the isolating nature of contemporary life, which often results in people turning to media content for purposes of social interaction and understanding social norms. The ubiquity of celebrity facilitates this with greater ease, enabling the celebrity to serve as a meaningful point of reference in the lives of the audience (Holmes and Redmond 2006). Through content about the celebrity, audiences are able to negotiate issues in their own lives. In being aware of this, the media create clear boundaries between the audience and celebrities to emphasise a hierarchy and manufacture desire.

It is in this regard that Ram (2002: 43) explains that,

> The role of gossip magazines and fanzines in constructing public/star images of actors/actresses for popular consumption is an inevitable, pervasive, universal and intertextual phenomenon. Not only is the film press in India almost as large as the film industry itself but writings about the star often supersede commentary on the films themselves.

Thrift further describes the presentation of the celebrity in the media as an:

> effortless gaze of public intimacy…(that) is calculated in every way – from the stance of the body to clothes and hairdo, even in some cases to the events of the course of life… (2010: 303).

Davis (2006) thus draws links between celebrity, capitalism and a hegemonic consumer culture. In line with media content assisting in maintaining hegemonic ideals in society, Davis argues that celebrity content encourages audience subscription to a homogenous, hegemonic culture, that influential celebrities, who are symbols of this culture, endorse.

While in the Bollywood context, little work has been done to measure the influence of the stars (with the bulk of the research done on Bollywood stars focusing on the men), Jain et al. (2017) note that celebrity endorsements in Indian advertising have proven to be successful, thereby using that as a measure of this influence. Here they argue that this influence is more than likely huge,

> … given Bollywood's reach and the way Bollywood stars are revered in the society. In fact, India is the largest movie market in the world in terms of the audience size and the number of movies that are produced in any given year. (Jain et al. 2017: 714)

In further demonstrating this influence, Shingler (2014) engages with the work of Yu to argue that Bollywood is one of the few industries that has both international and transnational stars. An international star is someone who achieves success by starring in films in their own country and language. Comparatively, a transnational star is someone who makes the move "from one film industry to another to make films, often in a different language from his or her own" (Shingler 2014: 100). Transnational Bollywood stars include Deepika Padukone, Priyanka Chopra and Aishwarya Rai, all of whom have successfully worked in both Bollywood, Hollywood and other regional Indian film industries.

Despite the megastardom of these women, the industry remains dominated by male stars (Chatterjee 2016). Ciecko (2001) explains that this is visible through the difference in the marketing of both actors and actress, as well as in relation to the pay inequality in the industry. This is further visible when considering the longevity of a male star as compared to a female star in the industry. Where some of the most successful male stars in the industry today are in their late 40s and early 50s, the most successful female stars range from the mid-

20s to 30s. Vetticad (2016) demonstrates this in her review of one of 2016's biggest films, *Sultan,* starring previously discussed superstar, Salman Khan. She writes,

> What makes this courtship truly seem silly is that the 'boy'- a mere 30 in the first half of the film – is played by a 50-year-old star. Khan stopped looking 30 about 21 years back. The casting of a 28-year-old actress as his lover merely emphasises this point. Why, dear Bollywood, cannot 50-year-old men play 50-year-old men? (2016)

This project recognises these issues, while also noting the broader significance of the celebrity in contemporary society, thus focusing on these often ignored Bollywood actresses as part of making sense of their role in society today.

## Chapter 3: Contextualising Indian Femininity(ies)

In mapping theoretical discussions of contemporary Indian femininity(ies), one is able to get a clear sense of the tensions that continue to exist between the traditional and modern in these manifestations. As noted, when it comes to conceptualising contemporary urban Indian femininity(ies), one recognises that it is meant to be both traditional and modern. The significance of tradition here ties to broader understandings of Indianness, national identity and national pride. From a feminist standpoint, the propping up of tradition in this way is also a way to reign in gender performance, ensuring it happens within clear boundaries of acceptability. However, one must also recognise that theory alone fails to capture the affective nuances of these performances in a contemporary context. Considering the constructed and learnt nature of gender via the media presents a practical and empirical face to this largely under explored area of study in a contemporary Indian context. It is in this regard that this project turns to Bollywood actresses and their representations in mainstream media spaces to properly understand the exact articulations of contemporary Indian femininity(ies). Through these deliberations this project asserts that the work that these women do, both on screen but also in reality via the media, is actually the work of femininity in an Indian space. Through media coverage of these women, the nature and boundaries of contemporary Indian femininity(ies) unfolds based on the ways in which the media lauds certain behaviours, styles, appearances and so on, while shaming others.

The project as a whole is, therefore, interested in understanding and presenting engagements on normative urban Indian femininities in a contemporary context via a detailed analysis of mainstream media content about Bollywood actresses. While the project explores the nuances of urban Indian femininity(ies) in great detail in the chapters to follow, it became important during this process to properly locate and contextualise the work. This is what this chapter aims to do. The chapter is, however, a methodological break from the core analysis chapters of the project. The focus is on introducing and contextualising empirical manifestations of Indian femininity(ies) in the mainstream media, showing what the chapters that follow will unpack and deal with in greater detail. In order to do this, the chapter centres on two celebrity weddings that took place towards the end of 2018. Through these two events, contemporary urban Indian femininity was presented to the world on a large scale. In turn, these examples show the wider importance of this project because of the fact that they played out on an

international stage with limited consideration of the discursive implications thereof. These events involve popular Bollywood actresses Deepika Padukone and Priyanka Chopra.

Deepika Padukone is an actress who made her Bollywood debut in 2007. To date Padukone has starred in over 20 Bollywood films and has established herself as one of the most popular and successful actresses in the industry, winning many awards for her performances. In 2017, she made her Hollywood debut when she starred in a big budget action film opposite American actor Vin Diesel. In addition to her acting work, Padukone is also known for her openness in talking about her struggle with depression. As a result, she also started a foundation to raise awareness about these issues in Indian society. Padukone got married to fellow actor Ranveer Singh in November 2018. A few weeks later in early December, actress Priyanka Chopra got married to American singer Nick Jonas. Chopra was first introduced to large audiences when she won Miss World in 2000. She soon transitioned into acting and by 2003 she made her debut in Bollywood. To date she has starred in over 40 Bollywood films and like Padukone is also one of the leading Bollywood actresses of the time. By 2015 she debuted in Hollywood when she was cast as the lead of a network dramatic thriller television show. Since then she has also starred in various Hollywood films. The wedding ceremonies of both Padukone and Chopra were extremely high profile and saw extensive global media attention. Importantly, when the data was collected for this project (2017) both actresses were unmarried and, therefore, categorised as young women. As a result, in the analysis chapters that follow, content about them is discussed and analysed accordingly. Nonetheless, these weddings provide empirical data to contextualise the contemporary urban Indian femininity that is presented to the world via the global media.

## *3.1 The weddings*

Demonstrating the popularity of these weddings, when search engine Google presented its review of 2018 it included a top ten list of the most searched weddings in the world for that year (Donovan 2018). While the British Royal wedding between Prince Harry and Meghan Markle was the most searched wedding globally, the second most searched wedding was Chopra's, while Padukone's was the fifth most searched wedding. This illustrates the very global nature of both events. Looking at these two events is less about the measured and detailed analysis seen in the analytical chapters of this project and more about foregrounding the way in which the three analytical chapters actually work in conjunction with each other to

present a thorough understanding of contemporary urban Indian femininity(ies). That these two weddings garnered worldwide attention demonstrates the need to properly understand how Indian femininity(ies) manifests today. The undeniable role of globalisation in this process ensures that these debates are no longer solely limited to the geographical confines of India. Rather, all the actresses mentioned in the project work as cultural commodities that find resonance and relevance in various spaces in and outside of India, be that via the Indian diaspora or other global citizens that engage with content from Bollywood.

There is particular significance around the imagery that emerged from both weddings. Interestingly, aware of the large-scale interest in their weddings, both actresses adopted different approaches to what would be shared with the public. Padukone's ceremony happened first in November 2018. Despite being largely non-committal when asked about her love life in the press, it was known that she was in a relationship with fellow actor Ranveer Singh. In an interview following her wedding, Padukone explained that the non-commitment to media queries was intentional as she is aware of the challenges and pressure that the constant media attention places on new relationships, thus she chose to "protect it as much as possible" (Pinkvilla 2018). Part of this pressure linked to ongoing and constant rumours about their impending marriage. This is demonstrated clearly in chapter four of this project where large amounts of media scrutiny about these speculated celebrity relationships are analysed further. Nonetheless, in October 2018 both actors opened up to the world about their union when they posted in both Hindi and English on their respective Instagram pages informing fans about their wedding (See Appendix 5). The post read:

> With the blessings of our families it gives us immense joy in sharing that our wedding is set to take place on the 14th and 15th of November, 2018.
>
> We thank you for all the love you have showered upon us over the years and seek your blessings as we embark on this incredible journey of love, loyalty, friendship and togetherness.
>
> Lots of love,
>
> Deepika and Ranveer (deepikapadukone 2018)

Instagram subsequently played an important role in how Padukone shared bits of her wedding with fans and the world. She was clear that privacy meant a lot to her and so opted for a ceremony outside of India in Lake Como, Italy. Furthermore, attendance was limited to close family and friends and the couple were able to request guests to leave any mobile phones and other communication devices behind, thereby further guarding their privacy. While people around the world eagerly awaited visuals from their ceremonies, this only happened when Padukone and Singh decided to share images on Instagram. Despite many anticipating leaked pictures from someone in attendance or grainy, zoomed in paparazzi pictures from the ceremony, nothing concrete emerged. Eventually, through a series of four posts in the days following their wedding, the couple released a collection of nineteen pictures from the various ceremonies that made up their wedding. As of January 2019, these eight posts received approximately 33.6 million likes between both Padukone and Singh's Instagram profiles.

In comparison, while Chopra did not post a note about her wedding to American singer Nick Jonas, the information was largely available via media content (both mainstream and social media) that speculated about this correctly. This started after Jonas arrived in India in August 2018 for an engagement ceremony. Chopra posted pictures from this ceremony on her Instagram page with the caption "The only way to do this…with Family and God. Thank you all for your wishes and blessings…" (priyankachopra 2018). Following this, Chopra was a lot more open about her wedding than Padukone, sharing pictures on Instagram from her bachelorette party and various other wedding-related events. Chopra also introduced a commercial angle to her ceremony in that she got into paid partnerships with companies, where she coupled their services with her own wedding planning activities and tasks like setting up a gift registry and so on. Eventually, Chopra's wedding took place in December 2018 in a palatial setting in Jodhpur, India. While she and Jonas both posted close to 20 pictures from the different ceremonies on their Instagram profiles (gaining a total of 58.8 million likes between them by January 2019) it has been reported that they sold their wedding video and exclusive pictures to an international magazine for a rumoured US$ 2.5 million (Thomas 2018).

Following both weddings, both couples hosted three different wedding receptions. All six of these events gave the media more access to the couple than the wedding ceremonies did. At

these receptions, the media were able to photograph the couple, their guests, as well as the different locations. The receptions also saw additional hype, especially in the Indian media because it was here that the rest of the Bollywood industry came together to wish the married couples well. In addition to the Bollywood stars posing on the red carpet of these events, guest videos (via mobile phones) were also leaked, showing people's favourite stars dancing and partying together. Thus, further piquing interest into the otherwise private lives of these celebrities.

It was this interest and hype that made these events all the more newsworthy in the media. This resulted in a lot being written about these weddings. When looking at these events, both individually as well collectively, one is able to recognise very specific ideas at play in relation to gender, femininity and the significance of marriage in the lives of Indian women. Knowing that contemporary Indian femininity is understood in the context of the tensions between traditional and modern gender performance (ideally with a skew towards the traditional) assists in unpacking these media representations. This begins even before the weddings themselves. When both actresses formally introduced their engagement to the world, both women specifically made mention of family. While weddings are indeed a time of family and togetherness, the mentions of family in these cases allude to familial acceptance, blessing and to some extent permission. In many western contexts, choice about marriage falls solely on the people getting married. In an Indian (geographical but also cultural) context this is traditionally a much more communal decision. Both actresses moving ahead with their family's blessings speak to this. Though it may not be clear what types of conversations played out behind closed doors, the familial unity presented fits neatly into broader understandings of tradition in this process, as exemplified of romantic love. Much like broader arguments made in chapter four, even in the examples of both these weddings, contemporary spins do emerge upon further inspection. Pointing out that both marriages are love marriages and not arranged marriages would be significant in some western contexts where there may be limited understandings of love and romance in urban India. However, in working to point out the everydayness of love in contemporary urban India, little additional attention will be paid to this point.

Furthermore, when looking at Chopra's wedding, immediate and obvious observations on the part of more conservative onlookers highlighted the fact that she was not only marrying a

white man who was a different religion to her, she was also marrying someone who was ten years younger than her. While this continued to come up on social media, little appeared to be made of these facts in the mainstream media considered. As such, the fusion of modern and traditional elements in Chopra's wedding were interesting to observe. Where often in this dichotomy modern is seen as western and traditional as Indian, Chopra alluded to this balance when captioning the first set of pictures she shared from her wedding ceremonies on Instagram. She wrote,

> One of the most special things that our relationship has given us is a merging of families who love and respect each other's faiths and cultures. And so planning our wedding with an amalgamation of both was so so amazing (priyankachopra 2018).

She further told *Hello!* magazine that,

> We are taking beautiful traditions that we both grew up with and we are personalizing them in a way that makes sense for us…It's been incredible to find the commonalities between our beliefs and figuring out how to blend them in a respectful and meaningful way (Shahid 2018).

This coming together of two worlds, cultures and faith for Chopra on a personal level was very much symbolic on a macro level of the navigation made within Indian femininity. In much the same way that the beauty queens (including Chopra) that took India to a global platform needed to be tangibly global yet still authentically Indian, the same applies for the contemporary Indian woman (Reddy 2006).

Comparatively, Padukone's wedding was a lot less culturally complex. While she and her husband come from different parts of India, resulting in different practices of Hinduism, this just resulted in two different types of Hindu ceremonies, rather than different religious ceremonies. Here the tension between modern and traditional femininity unfolded around the juxtaposition of Padukone and her career. As a modern woman with a career, Padukone opted to actively emphasise and embrace the traditions of her culture, not only through what was done in their wedding ceremonies but also in terms of what she wore. While chapter five of this project deals with issues of the feminine body (including fashion and beauty) in greater detail, the fashion choices at these weddings make interesting points. Specifically, from a public engagement and consumption point of view, the memory of Padukone's more glamorous and 'modern' characters that audiences encounter via her work on screen and in

the media, strongly influences perceptions of her in very traditional attire seen in her wedding images.

For the Konkani wedding ceremony (Padukone's family is Konkani), stylist for the wedding and famous Indian fashion designer Sabyasachi Mukherjee (sabyasachiofficial 2018) alludes to this tradition on his Instagram that "As per Konkani tradition, the bride's saree is gifted to her by the mother for her wedding. Deepika's wedding saree was given to us by her mother - Mrs Ujjala Padukone". In this outfit, which is traditionally the bronze colour seen with Konkani brides, Padukone was styled to a very culturally specific aesthetic with corresponding jewellery as well as fresh flowers in her hair (See Appendix 6). Her saree is draped over her head as is traditionally done with brides and her hands are covered in mehndi (a henna based paste that is used to create designs on a bride's hands and feet). Similarly, for the Sindhi ceremony (Singh's family is Sindhi), she wore a Sabyasachi designed lehenga (an elaborately decorated skirt) set with matching scarves in the traditional red and gold colours a north Indian bride wears (See Appendix 7). The border of the scarf on her head was embroidered with traditional Sanskrit words that translate to English as "May you always be lucky as a married woman" (Hindustan Times 2018). While one may never truly know Padukone's intentions behind these choices for her wedding attire, these images are consumed in a very specific context, where issues of tradition are innately linked to understandings of contemporary Indian femininity(ies), thereby influencing the way in which these images are understood and internalised.

In a similar fashion, Chopra also wore the traditional bridal colour of red for her Hindu wedding ceremony. Like Padukone's, Chopra's lehenga was designed by Sabyasachi and she too sported a scarf over her head like a veil, which Susong (2017) notes is traditionally used as a sign of modesty (See Appendix 8). As Chopra shared a lot more details from her wedding with the media, one was able to note via *Vogue* (Newbold 2019) that her outfit was accessorised with a 16-carat diamond headpiece and an 84.50 carat diamond necklace. In locating the style choices, Chopra's choice of red, as well as the covering her head with her scarf, speaks to tradition. Interestingly, however, Chopra actively sought to balance out these traditional choices by also incorporating modern elements in the finer detail of her outfit. Noting the coming together of modern and traditional elements in her outfit selection, Chopra tells the magazine:

> I always knew I wanted a red traditional silhouette for my wedding, but Sabya brought in incredible French embroidery to the mix, and with incredible jewellery and western-inspired veil. It was just such an amalgamation of who I am! (Shahid 2018).

Through this quote, Chopra continues to thoroughly demonstrate the complexities of contemporary Indian femininity(ies) in the most interesting ways, in particular noting that while there are modern (read western) elements, the outfit is largely traditionally Indian. This works as a poetic metaphor for the idealised Indian femininity(ies) noted throughout this project.

While these complexities can be noted throughout this project in the data considered, Chopra often articulates this explicitly. For example, for their Christian ceremony, Chopra wore a handmade Ralph Lauren designer gown with a 22.8-meter-long veil that trailed as she walked down the aisle (See Appendix 9). *Vogue* reports that the outfit took 1826 hours to make (Newbold 2019). That the dress was long sleeved and high necked was interesting because many tend to assume that western styles tend to be more excessive and revealing (Krishna and Da Silva 2015). As such, it is likely that some understood this decision as an ode to her Indianness (read traditional).

The tension between modern and traditional also unfolded in the outfits both women wore to their numerous receptions. It is speculated that each couple had one reception for extended family, one for the media and one for Bollywood industry friends and colleagues. The looks for each of these were carefully styled (their stylists were often credited in some way on Instagram) and all choices were thus intentional. Chopra, for instance, stayed with the measured balance between modern and tradition in the outfits she wore (See Appendices 10, 11 and 12). Though these outfits were traditionally Indian, there were clear elements in the styling that accented and incorporated a modern disposition as well. Opting for outfits that showed a bit more skin, Chopra also seemingly moved away from other traditional markers of wifehood like the *sindoor* (a dash of vermillion applied at the top of a married Hindu woman's forehead usually where her hair is parted that symbolises her matrimony) and veils, which were worn by Padukone.

Comparatively it became clear that Padukone opted for demurer and traditional looks for these events. At her first two receptions in particular, she opted for long, flowy sarees, one of

which even included a separate veil (See Appendices 13 and 14). The *sindoor* on her head is distinct and the overall look in both cases is clearly intended to be more traditional and wifely. A similar style is adopted for her third and final wedding reception (See Appendix 15). However, this event directly aligned with the previously mentioned juxtaposition between Padukone as a marker of tradition (by virtue of being an Indian woman) and her career. That this reception was for the Bollywood industry, her place of work, meant one saw the most merging with a more modern disposition as compared to fully traditional outfit choices. One recognises this immediately because this was the only time that Padukone wore a gown rather than a saree. Tradition however was remembered via the use of the long matching veil that Padukone is pictured in. Interestingly, once inside the event Padukone unclipped the longer skirt, train and veil transforming her look into a mini-dress. She also changed from stilettos to sneakers opting for comfort to be able to enjoy the event and dance with her guests. While likely unintentional on the part of Padukone, such choices for the industry reception directly align with the tensions around women working after marriage as explored further in chapter six of this project. That it was the Bollywood event that caused the otherwise continuous display of tradition to waver allows those in power, those in favour of the status quo and those with a more conservative disposition to easily justify their backward understandings of ideal contemporary Indian femininity(ies) and tradition that is perceived to be threatened by a woman working outside the home.

## *3.2 Post the weddings*

Beyond the ceremonies themselves, these women getting married also gave rise to other conversations, as they transitioned from young women to actresses who were also married. While in some contexts this transition may seem insignificant, in the context of Bollywood and more broadly India, there is a pointed significance. Certain elements of their femininity and more broadly their gender performance are assumedly expected to recalibrate to accommodate newer boundaries that emerge as a result of their marriage. These shifting boundaries between youth, marriage and motherhood are explored throughout the three analysis chapters that follow this chapter. However, as noted previously, data collected at that time of writing the chapters still categorises Padukone and Chopra as young women who are unmarried. Because of this, both actresses saw a lot of speculation about their love lives, including who they were dating and when they were going to settle down and get married.

Marriage is given a lot of importance and in an interview post her marriage Padukone speaks to this explaining that,

> When you're in a relationship, there's still a lot of nerves, you're still unsure, no matter how long you've been dating. I guess, the terms boyfriend and girlfriend sound frivolous. Somewhere it doesn't carry the weightage as marriage does (Choudhary 2018).

Padukone describes dating as something that leads to a lot of uncertainty and instability while marriage is understood as the opposite. However, what the data considered both for this chapter and the project more broadly shows is that once a wife and then mother, the boundaries of femininity shift. Thus, even briefly noting the shift in the lives of Padukone and Chopra towards wifehood gives a current and contemporary feel to the context being provided.

To note this shift, I considered interviews that both Padukone and Chopra did after getting married. While Padukone did indeed partake in some interviews, Chopra left India for her honeymoon and family vacation shortly after her wedding festivities were over. As such, much of what was considered focused on Padukone primarily. However, if I came across important material around Chopra, I included it in the considerations. Through these considerations, one was able to note a largely positive response to the marriage of these actresses. Focus was placed on their happiness as a result of getting married. In isolation such happiness is harmless, but considering the constant pressure placed on young women to find love and settle down meant that this response was not purely harmless. So even if Padukone herself is responding to questions in ways that emphasise her happiness post marriage, the context of this happiness, as per the media, speaks to an affective register that shows women the effects of settling down.

Demonstrating this, in the *Filmfare* magazine cover feature on Padukone, writer Choudhary (2018) introduces the actress in the following way,

> It's a few days after the wedding. The afterglow of the ceremony is still visible. The sindoor peeps out from her voluminous tresses, the chuda clangs in her arms while the diamond studded mangalsutra winks mischievously from around her neck. There's a twinkle in her eye too. Happiness hugs Deepika Padukone like a warm blanket…She finds contentment in marriage. It's early days yet, sure. But she's loving the idea of

> waking up with someone beside her. She's also liking playing the wife – seeing Ranveer off to work, calling him to find out what time he'll be home, what he'll have for dinner…these are new experiences and she's enjoying herself.

In this excerpt alone, one finds a lot to consider. Specifically, focus should be placed on the role of tradition and how it filters into gender performance now that Padukone is married. This is especially significant considering the noted tensions that influence the ways in which contemporary Indian femininity is understood. Mention of *sindoor*, *chuda* (traditionally red and white bangles that a bride wears on her wedding day and keeps on for a varying amount of time based on tradition) and the *mangalsutra* (a specific necklace a married Hindu woman wears to symbolise her marriage) immediately locate tradition at the fore. Furthermore, despite being a successful actress in her own right, that they note how she sees her husband off to work, checks on him and arranges his supper is also nothing but intentional and gendered. Even if Padukone is personally enjoying the changes in her life as a result of her marriage, one should not ignore the significance of media content framing matters of tradition (generally and in relation to gender performance) in a positive, fun and cute way, such that tradition is celebrated and re-inscribed into a woman's life. Here it is important to note that such a critique is neither suggesting that Padukone should be anything but happy about her marriage nor that tradition should be demonised. Rather this project is illustrating ways in which the media merge and conflate tradition and its various meanings into something that justifies gendered ways of being, such that contemporary urban Indian women are meant to willingly seek it as part of looking for happiness.

During their interview, Padukone tells *Pinkvilla* (2018), a Bollywood news website, that getting married was one of the best things she has done in her life, such that she now feels "whole", "complete" and "grounded". As such, it naturally falls in line with other affective pressures placed on people, especially young women, to settle down too. The same can be noted when she tells the editor of *Filmfare* Jitesh Pillai (2018) on his talk show, *Famously Filmfare*, that no longer being alone and having someone to share a space with is the "the most beautiful thing". The framing and presentation of her transition to wifehood as extremely positive demonstrates what is to come for other single women once they make the same transition. Similarly, when talking about Priyanka Chopra's marriage, Padukone tells Choudhary (2018) that Chopra always sought stability in her life through a romantic relationship, adding that she now seems content that she has found it. She elaborates:

> Whatever little I know of her, I know these things were important to her. Like to find love, to find a person who gives it his hundred per cent, who gives the stability you look for in a relationship. She craved it. I'm thrilled she's found it. It's been a rollercoaster for her as well (Choudhary 2018).

Noteworthy in both these instances is that romantic relationships and the effects of them are emphasised. Through the presentation of such observations, insights and quotes from these women, the media is able to highlight an 'ideal' trajectory for other urban Indian women.

However, in addition to this critique aimed at the media specifically, some of what Padukone herself says is easily located within normative understandings of Indian femininity and the tensions between tradition and modern practices and thinking. This makes sense considering that Padukone is herself a young, urban Indian woman. In these instances, these quotes also work towards the intention of the patriarchal media with little additional effort on their part. An example of this is when she specifically identifies herself as traditional, telling Choudhary (2018) that,

> When you're in a relationship it's different. We didn't want to live together and then see if we wanted to marry each other or not. We're both traditional in that sense. Of course, as boyfriend and girlfriend you stay over, you go for holidays together but we used to come back to our own homes. We were clear that we'd start living together after marriage and figure life as we go along. Or else where's the beauty in that discovery? So now we're figuring things out. Like I'm figuring out his routine. I call him in the evening to check how his day is going and what time he's coming home, what he will have for dinner…All of this is great!

In many western contexts, such a quote might seem antiquated and conservative. However, to many Indians, both in India and the diaspora, something as simple as living together before marriage is still considered taboo. Nonetheless, Padukone highlights the merger of traditional practices with modern, noting that as a couple before marriage they still would stay over or holiday together, though this was not permanent. Furthermore, that the writer was able to draw from her mention of the excitement around performing 'duties' as a wife also highlights the aforementioned merger. So, while she may say that one should not compromise on one's individual identity in a marriage, she also says that post her marriage she feels "a lot more grounded", "secure" and "protected" (Choudhary 2018). The word choice here can be seen to

run parallel with understandings of the docility seen in more traditional versions of femininity.

In line with these traditional understandings of gender, a long standing happening in the Bollywood industry was the idea that once an actress marries, she no longer continues to work. This is presumably because she is now bound by more tradition as a wife and has a home to look after, children to prepare for and then look after as well. This expectation is one of the most glaring boundary shifts that happens when an actress transitions to wifehood. While there is a shift today, especially with the likes of Padukone, Chopra, Anushka Sharma, Sonam Kapoor (both of whom were also unmarried when the data was collected for this project) and Kareena Kapoor Khan, this is relatively new. As such, the media often find ways to raise this in relation to these women. It is in this regard that that when interviewing Padukone on his talk show, *Famously Filmfare*, editor of the magazine, Jitesh Pillai (2018), asked Padukone if she and her husband now have a new policy for signing future roles that dictates they will not kiss on screen (which also moves to locate the actress in the more traditional and pious realm). While Padukone laughed this off Pillai then posed to her,

> It's interesting also that you know heroines, I mean it always existed but in between there was a lull phase you know, where marriage meant the end of your career. It's interesting the shelf life I mean there's no shelf life today whether it's you, whether it's Anushka, whether it's Sonam, whether it's Priyanka. It's interesting how actors are now being seen as yes she's an actor and yes she's also married… (Pillai 2018).

This style of questioning is often seen in the media consulted for this project, where questions are worded in a way that is either hesitant or seem harmless and almost in jest but nonetheless circle back to tradition in very clear ways. While feeling slightly awkward doing so, the host clearly points to the notion that actresses have a shelf life. Similarly, in her interview with Choudhary (2018), Padukone is asked, "Coming to your marriage, have we now moved away from the notion that marital status of an actress affects the box-office", as well as "Will your marriage affect the kind of films that you'll say yes to now?". The second question Choudhary asks links directly to Pillai's question about a no intimacy rule on screen going forward. The notion here is that that Padukone is now married, her marriage should guide the type of work she chooses, avoiding anything too bold and risky as per the boundaries of wifehood. Furthermore, the use of the word affect in both questions is particularly interesting

because of the ways in which harmless, hesitant, joking or matter of fact types of questions actually guide both the reader/viewer as well as the interviewee in clear ways. While in 2018-2019 it would seem ludicrous for mainstream media to openly suggest that a woman should no longer work after marriage, they can pose such statements in ways that implicitly amount to that. Furthermore, though some may argue that these questions simply give actresses the chance to rebut such expectations and assert their contrary views, the reality is that with such traditional thought and practice existing freshly in recent memory, this isn't the case. Moreover, locating such questions within the broader affective register of media narratives means that even though they are implicit, the meaning is clear.

In response to these questions, Padukone seems intentionally rebellious. She tells Pillai that seeing a married actress is long overdue. She elaborates,

> [It's] high time because we've seen that happen in the west. It has never impacted their professional life or their persona on screen and I'm glad that we're headed in that direction (Pillai 2018).

She adds to this, telling Choudhary that there is no reason her being married should influence the work she chooses. She explains that this selection process is a creative one and is influenced by "the journey of life" (2018). She also rejects the notion that married actresses are not able to perform commercially, arguing,

> Everyone is married. Does that mean that the industry comes to a standstill? Does that mean we have no girls left? I guess previously it was the person's choice more than box office diktats. If actresses didn't work after marriage it was their choice to prioritize something else over work. Probably, they were exhausted and just wanted to live life and nurture their families. But I'm sure the millennial woman doesn't feel like that. When you don't feel like that, it won't be that way (Pillai 2018).

With this response, Padukone also demonstrates the relevance of the feminist critique of postfeminism in this context, as well as in this project. In ignoring the structural and power based issues around the longevity of a woman's career in Bollywood and attributing it solely to their choice not to work, emphasises personal choice and agency over the broader issues at play. While agency may have been a factor in some cases, this alone was not responsible for the notion that married actresses should stop working. From the sides of film production, audience consumption and family responsibility, this was likely based on certain assumptions around the respectability politics of more conservative times. While a lot of effort was made

to move away from that, living in a postfeminist context means that feminist gains of the past are often ignored and/or denied (Maharajh 2014). This likely also extends to a limited understanding of the challenges of the past as a result of not recognising the importance of history and historical context. As such, for Padukone to underscore the agency of actresses in the past when rationalising why they did not work after marriage is to skirt around key systemic issues that limited this participation. While there may well have been some actresses who consciously opted to stop working after marriage, there were also those that stopped getting work based on their marital status or maybe were not allowed to work by their husband and/or families. Attributing a shift in this system to millennial women is extremely postfeminist in nature, where feminist work is overlooked and personal choice to continue working is emphasised.

However, despite this problematic instance, Padukone also challenges the media when required. In addition to conversations about actresses working after marriage, conversations also often turn to when she will have children. While in conversation with *Pinkvilla* (2018), Padukone did initially try to answer such a question as diplomatically as possible. However, she eventually grew firm about the limits of such questioning. Here the interviewer asked the actress,

> This is a bit of a tricky question but it's still a question I'm going to ask because the minute you get married especially for an actress the second thing that you ask, even if it's an actor getting married you don't ask this, but when an actress gets married the first thing that comes is pregnancy rumors. Like it's already happened with Anushka recently where people just went like crazy going like 'she's pregnant, she's pregnant, she's pregnant' so how would you tackle a question like that when it gets framed for you? (Pinkvilla 2018).

Again, here one is able to note a similar style where the interviewer asks the question without asking the question. It is framed in a reflective yet hypothetical way as a means of testing the waters to see if any publishable content could come from the response, while also not being so direct as to immediately appear regressive and offensive. Importantly, it's often the same media that speculate unashamedly about such rumours but interestingly change their tone when talking directly to the actress. In her initial response to this question, Padukone

explained an understanding of the fact that rumours and speculation come with being an actress and celebrity. Further, regarding her future as a mother, she says that motherhood:

> trump[s] being married and that's what I hear from people who have had children. And of course it'll happen at some point but…I think it's very very unfair to put women through that or to put a couple through that (Pinkvilla 2018).

When the interviewer continues to press the topic by noting, "because there's so many stereotypes of what happens after marriage which still continues…" Padukone interrupts her to say "Sure, I guess the day we stop asking the questions is the day we'll bring about change", thereby highlighting the role the media plays in such thinking (Pinkvilla 2018).

Despite this, based on the patriarchal nature of such media content and its role in re-securing tradition in this context, speculation like this continues. Demonstrating this about Priyanka Chopra, *Bollywood Life* (Banerjee 2018) picked up on a social media comment fellow actress Nargis Fakhri made in response to a picture Chopra posted from one of her wedding receptions. The publication reports that Fakhri said "ya'll two gonna make beautiful babies", which was enough for them to write an entire article about the same (Banerjee 2018). Within the article, Banerjee recalls past comments Chopra had made about wanting to have children someday. She also suggests that Chopra is good with kids, based on the smiling pictures she posts on her social media with younger members of her extended family, thereby also explaining that Chopra is "quite vocal about her love for kids" (Banerjee 2018). As the article concludes Banerjee does however write,

> Talking about babies, the couple said 'Let us be married first for a while before we have to make all these big decisions. We're in our honeymoon period right now and we will be for a very long time' (2018).

Even if the couple asked for some space to be able to enjoy being newlyweds, similar to Padukone's rejection of the pressure placed on newlyweds, the media continue to subtly and affectively guide the reader to recognise the importance of having children, something that is still presented as a defining factor of womanhood today.

It is in this regard that this project works to properly unpack the ways in which mainstream English medium media from India construct and disseminate understandings of contemporary Indian femininity(ies) through coverage of Bollywood actresses. In terms of the questions posed to Padukone and Chopra after their marriages, one is able to recognise certain shifts in

what is expected of them now that they are married women. This links strongly to the assertions by McRobbie (2003) in relation to the ways in which the media micromanages all aspects of a woman's life, ensuring that she is socialised in ways that guide her towards specific ideals in relation to gender, based on both the status quo and where she is in her life. However, in noting that this process is not uniform, the project turns to the work of Dosekun (2015), who writes about the internationally transferable nature of modern understandings of femininity. This happens in specific ways, influenced by context specific nuances. This project thus works to establish the nuances of a globally transferrable postfeminism in an Indian context that specifically works to encourage an ideal femininity that is both global and local. The analytical chapters that follow thus both individually and thematically unpack these nuances. Collectively the project is then able to not just understand how postfeminism manifests in an Indian context, but also understand the nature of these manifestations through the various categories of a woman's life, as per normative understandings of femininity.

# Chapter 4: Femininity and Work

## *4.1 Femininity and Work*

### 4.1.1 The work of femininity

Work is gendered. Graham and Rich (2014) make a link to the media here in noting that the media involve themselves in influencing "people in how they may come to think about socio-cultural and political issues" (2014: 501). Allen and Mendick (2013: 79) thus argue that,

> …identity is not a voluntary project of self-making. Rather, it is always set within a social, cultural and economic context, which sets limits on the kinds of identities that are available to particular selves: people position themselves within, and are positioned by, discourses.

These media discourses are extremely powerful. D'Enbeau et al. (2015) note that a common circulation in this regard is the idea that work is generally understood in relation to men. This is despite the fact that, as Chandra (2012) notes, for the large majority of society, working outside the home means being able to provide for and afford a better life for themselves and their family. Through years of this understanding circulating, the masculine nature of the environment has been deeply entrenched. This links to the traditional notion that men were expected to leave the home to work and earn a living while women stayed at home to look after the house and family. Mauno et al. (2012) attribute this to the ways in which women are socialised into the role of the nurturing, self-sacrificing caregiver, while men are encouraged to act as the provider.

It is as a result of this that Rothausen-Vange (2004) points out that,often explanations of the ideal employee are fraught with characteristics that are traditionally understood as masculine. These include elements of rationality as compared to emotionality, assertiveness as compared to docility, and independence as compared to dependence. That girls from a young age (if not birth itself) are socialised into gender roles that exhibit these characteristics that are considered the antithesis of the ideal employee is to intentionally demonstrate the way in which women are a supposed misfit in this space. Rothausen-Vange thus explains that,

> Masculine family roles (i.e., provider) and the role of ideal worker are interdependent and complementary; however, feminine family roles (i.e. available nurturer) and the role of ideal worker are independent and conflicting… (2004: 56)

The dichotomy that emerges for women highlights the tension between paid professional labour and unpaid domestic labour. As per tradition, as a result of the centrality of domestic labour in the lives of women, the ever-demanding nature of work outside of the home means that should she opt for a career, it will result in one or both sides of the supposedly naturalised dichotomy to suffer. These tensions are still emphasised today, even with larger numbers of women being part of the global workforce as compared to the past. Furthermore, these tensions largely continue to be presented as belonging to women exclusively. This is often done affectively in ways that highlight their misfit in the professional realm. For example, women are demonised for demonstrating overt professional ambition as this demonstrates additional commitment to the workspace at the expense of the domestic space (Benschop et al. 2013). This premise is similarly applied to younger women who may not have a family of their own yet. Motherhood is presented as inevitable and so commitment to the workspace need not be as unwavering as a man's should be because ultimately her responsibilities will shift (Graham and Rich 2014). This is because in addition to a professional workload, domestic responsibilities are still mostly seen as belonging to women. Mauno et al. (2012: 108) further observe that that particularly when women are mothers, they:

> start to focus more on family demands and actively seek work-family balance, e.g., by reducing their working hours, whereas men (fathers) often even increase their working hours and do less at home.

Linking to this, as more and more women joined the workforce (both by choice and/or economic need), one began noticing increased efforts to normalise the expectation of women shouldering double the responsibility. What soon emerged through media channels was the notion of women as successful multitaskers that can have and do it all, thereby maintaining capitalistic need and patriarchal expectation (Hadfield et al. 2007).

Building on this, one also saw the emergence and circulation of what is termed work life balance (WLB). Originating from more neoliberal, western contexts, this term is in response to the perceived struggle modern women face, what is termed work life conflict (WLC). Chandra (2012: 1040) describes WLC as the tension that emerges when the "demands of work hamper the pursuit of other life interests". However, for Mortazavi et al. (2009) this is beyond just work preventing individuals from doing other things in their life. They explain

that it is also about the demands of a domestic life impacting the success of one's professional life. Here they explain,

> Work-family conflict is defined as a form of interrole conflict…where role pressures from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respect…More recently, work-family conflict has been depicted as two-dimensional, consisting of work interfering with family and family interfering with work… (Mortazavi et al. 2009: 253)

This perceived incompatibility that aligns with the established dichotomy of professional versus domestic again highlights the gendered way in which work is understood. WLB thereby emerges as a supposed solution to the issues that emerge as a result of WLC. While the WLB interventions could also be applicable to men, Mauno et al. (2012) note that men are a lot less affected by issues of WLC and WLB. This is especially because of the way in which masculinity is intrinsically linked to having a career.

Nonetheless, Smith (2010) explains that WLB links to people finding and striking a balance between the demands of their professional and domestic lives. Chandra (2012) adds to this understanding in explaining that WLB is also about understanding that employees have various responsibilities both in relation to their job and their family, and so they need to be able to take care of those responsibilities as best they can. The neoliberal justification, especially in western contexts, is that rather than leave the workforce altogether, finding a supposed balance ensures that the person continues working, increasing earnings and increasing spending while also being able to maintain other hegemonic demands around gender and so on. By pursuing the notion of balance rather than striving for more equality between genders, such a solution justifies the polarity of the two spheres of life and the need to manage them without compromising either.

While on paper and in practice, particularly in western contexts, issues of WLB link to more than just issues of domestic labour, but includes finding time for things like hobbies, mental wellbeing and so on, in practice this is different. The crux of WLB in many ways does link to the gendered nature of the workplace and how a woman manages to exist in different roles both in the workplace and at home. This is especially the case in spaces outside of the west where understandings of work and family tend to differ from western understandings. Moratzavi et al. (2009: 255) thereby argue that in actuality, "work and family issues are

linked to cultural beliefs, values, and norms…". That current understandings of work often fail to capture this nuance links to an existing criticism that this field of research faces where many note that existing discussions are primarily based on the western lived experiences (Chandra 2012). Rothausen-Vange (2004: 56) further elaborates that much of this work,

> often reflect white, middle-class reality. Individuals who identify as members of other ethnic groups, races, socio-economic classes, and sexual orientations may experience gendered work and family roles in ways that also reveal class and race effects, as well as heterosexism…

Demonstrating this practically, Chandra (2012) uses an example of a husband who opts to stay at home and do more of the domestic labour while his wife focuses on her career. Here, she explains that where in western contexts domestic "…responsibilities are shared more or less equally between spouses. It is not uncommon to see men sacrificing their careers in favour of their spouses', a phenomenon unusual in Indian context" (2012: 1045). Similarly, through their study on celebrity news, Gorin and Dubied (2011: 613) note a determination in the media texts they considered where "Even when film stars are presented with babies, these 'will not prevent [them] from continuing their acting careers'…". D'Enbeau et al. (2015) thereby add to this in explaining that while western women may draw on ideas that emphasise the individual and her rights to counter the gender dynamics of work, this is not always the case elsewhere in the world. Furthermore, where WLB is presented as a solution to western women struggling to balance all the responsibilities in her life, the translation of this outside of the west emerges in ways that are too simplistic.

Demonstrating this, Mortazavi et al. (2009) draw links to issues of individualism and collectivism. In western spaces, where a more individualistic approach flourishes, focus is on the individual and her/his preferences. Comparatively, in many spaces outside the west (like India for example) a more collectivist approach emerges where members of that society's "cultures define themselves according to group membership (e.g., family, country), and they emphasize group norms, goals, and needs over personal ones…" (2009: 255). As such, how WLB manifests in spaces like Europe for example and how it manifests in India is completely different (Chandra 2012).

Fleetwood (2007: 352) thus presents the most holistic engagement with the concept of WLB which in many ways also speaks to the complexities of the Indian context as well. Here he explains,

> The phrase 'work-life balance' tends to imply that 'work' and 'life' are two distinct spheres of activity when the former is, clearly, part of the latter; that our lives are divided only between (paid) 'work' and some other, undifferentiated, (and under elaborated) activity called 'life'; that work is somehow bad and life is good, so we need less of the former and more of the latter (Fleetwood 2007: 352).

Through this definition, Fleetwood knowingly or unknowingly alludes to the gendered nature of such a term, particularly when noting the implication that work is bad and life is good. Furthermore, this gendered nature demonstrates that by locating idealised femininity within the domestic, women are forced to acknowledge this through the expectation that they need balance. This is especially relevant for spaces like India where more traditional understandings of gender and femininity are still influential (Chandra 2012). It is thus not surprising that Smith (2010) is able to conclude that WLB is especially important to women. This is particularly because of the ways in which the norm dictates that men give more importance to paid work outside the home thereby establishing the expectation that they are more accepting of the demands that their jobs place on them (Moratazavi et al. 2009).

Rothausen-Vange (2004) argues that it is through family responsibility that gender socialisation (seen for example in the media) really comes to fruition. Minnotte (2016: 181) explains that it is through parenthood that men and women perform their gender more so than before especially because of the ways in which family is "one of the most gendered institutions in society". Rothausen-Vange (2004: 55) further explains that,

> our society tends to define being a good wife and mother as being continually available for emotional nurturing of the husband, children and other dependents, assuming primary responsibility for the physical and developmental care of dependents, and being warm and welcoming, whereas our concept of a good husband or father is someone who provides economic goods to the family, and (secondarily) is a disciplinarian, authority figure, and plays with the children…In sum, although heterosexual couples conform to this norm to different degrees, women's roles in the family are socio-emotional, whereas men's roles are instrumental…

This then not only renders a woman secondary in all spheres of her life, it also highlights the ways in which WLB begins to be more important for women because they need to also be continuously present for their families at home. Thus, while WLB initially appeared as a concept to solve the tensions between work and domestic life, eventually it also emerged as gendered and problematic in the ways in which it relocates women who found themselves outside of the domestic, back within it.

Resultantly, the gendered nature of WLB becomes clearer as one recognises that it is perceived as something that speaks more to the concerns of women and the need for them to also do the work of care in addition to their professional commitments. Wattis et al. (2013: 13) reiterates the gendered nature of WLB when coupled with domestic care work, observing the contradiction that "women are now expected to be economically active… but care continues to be viewed as a feminine activity which women must balance with paid work". The need to maintain this care work is further reiterated by seemingly unrelated media discourses that emphasise the need for active parenting. Minnotte (2016) explains that while ideal fatherhood is still able to fall back on traditionally masculine understandings of breadwinning and so on, this is not the case for ideal motherhood. Here "…dominant cultural norms stipulate intensive mothering is the apex of mothering…This set of norms calls for mothers to engage in an intensively hands-on, active, and time-consuming form of parenting…" (Minnotte 2016: 183). Hadfield et al. (2007: 258) add to this by noting that through discursive constructs in the media it is suggested that "children need their parents to be playmates who will run around the park with them, for example".

Working outside the home disallows such hands on attention. It is in this way that "…mothers may experience greater stress than fathers in negotiating work and family domains due to larger societal expectations that frown on maternal employment…" (Minnotte 2016: 183). This is then why WLB would seem to be more important to women than it is to men. In a patriarchal context, the gendered nature of the WLB term in a traditionally masculine space like the workplace, leads to many people outwardly rejecting the need for WLB. This is done in order to demonstrate a commitment to greater career success (Chandra 2012). Chandra adds to this in noting that,

> In most Asian countries, working long hours is often seen as a commitment to the job. Negotiating for shorter work hours is often perceived as a sign of weakness and

> employees prefer not to talk of it in recruitment process unless specifically asked. Nordic countries seem to prefer shorter work hours. They tend to negotiate for tradeoffs between wages and working hours and moderate wage rates particularly in times of economic crisis. (2012: 1045).

Based on this, commitment to work in this context is given utmost importance. The expectations placed on Indian women, for example, suggest that she cannot fulfil both professional and domestic roles successfully based on the demands of both roles. This is primarily because in India, the notion of the idealised worker and the idealised mother tend to stand in even further contrast than in western contexts. Furthermore, with more importance given to her domestic role, the affective nudges to relocate her back in that realm are a lot stronger. This is especially because this is a context where the role of culture and tradition are understood as defining shapers of ideal Indian femininity(ies). As a result, one is able to quickly recognise that WLB is not as universally applicable as assumed. In western contexts WLB reminds women of their domestic responsibilities while encouraging some form of balance between the various sets of responsibilities she may have. However, Chandra (2012: 1045) explains that in an Indian context in response to WLC, a woman opting to sacrifice her career is seen as "a natural offshoot of woman/motherhood".

Links can be established here to Indian gender socialisation which regularly emphasises the importance of family, particularly for women. D'Enbeau et al. (2015: 284) demonstrate this in their Indian study where they conclude that, "For participants, career success was attainable only if they had a family with whom to share their success". Through their engagements with Indian women, they demonstrate the collectivist approach these women take when engaging the topic of success; where they ultimately explain that they would rather walk with their families together at all times than by themselves. The centrality of family in their lives further demonstrates why WLB alone is not enough for Indian women and many, therefore, see the sacrifice of one's career as the natural step to take after becoming a parent. This again works to highlight the supposed inability for women to properly exist as both a successful career person and a successful care provider. D'Enbeau et al. (2015: 274) say this tension in particular is significant for women outside of the west, explaining that,

> …negotiating the contradictions of the ideal worker and ideal woman can be especially challenging because globalization has circulated Western work ideals (i.e.,

gender equitable workplace practices, occupational choice) that become tenuous when embedded in non-Western contexts with more conservative gender norms.

Thus, while the dynamics of globalisation may attempt to present western understandings of these issues as globally uniform, how these issues emerge in spaces outside of the west differs greatly. Western lived experiences may indeed have the power to influence understandings of key issues based on their position of power when it comes to globalisation. However, the reality is that assuming global uniformity in these understandings is ignoring key contextual issues that manifest and are unique to each environment and space. This chapter thus works to present greater nuance in relation to issues of work and the contemporary urban Indian context. The chapter begins by considering data about young women and how their careers are discussed in the media. The chapter then moves to consider data on actresses who are wives, looking at how, despite the determination of some young women to work after marriage, the content about the current generation of actresses who are wives celebrates that they chose to put their career second and their home life first. Here, focus is placed on their (as per the media considered) eagerness to have babies. The chapter then finally looks at data about actresses who are mothers, where issues around WLB, sacrifice and guilt all emerge for these working women, who are also mothers. In totality then, the chapter clearly highlights the tensions that exist for these women in a contemporary Indian context.

## *4.2 Young women*

In establishing a trajectory of sorts as women progress from their youth to life as a married woman and then as a mother, much of the discursive work that emerges around young women and work is intended to set the tone for the rest of this trajectory. The boundaries of idealised femininity shift as these women move from youth to wifehood and eventually motherhood, specifically in relation to how these women are relocated within the domestic realm. However, within this theme more than with others, there are certain fundamental principles that are constantly alluded to, even in discourse around young women who are only marginally located within the domestic space. Through the discursive constructions around women and work, the tone is set early on in the progression and rather than shifting the goal posts as women become wives and mothers, this tone is amplified. It is in this regard

that data around women and work is the most detailed in relation to young women. Subthemes within this section, therefore, look at issues of professional work, everyday work and vocal work.

### 4.2.1 Professional work

When looking at young women and professional work, a general overview of the data considered suggests that young women need to take their work seriously (Shah 2017a), while being hardworking, honest, focused (Iyengar 2017h) and versatile (Rajani 2017h). They need to be pretty (Sudhakaran 2017a), glamorous (priyankachopra 2017; jaquelinef143 2017) sexy (Johar 2017b), stylish (deepikapadukone 2017) and humble (Johar 2017d). Talking about Priyanka Chopra, *Bollywood Life* (Iyengar 2017h) explains "Priyanka is very lively, extremely adaptable and smart". A young woman then also needs to be poised, diplomatic, sociable (Iyengar 2017h), flexible (Iyengar 2017h) and smart about work. She also needs to always recognise the need to always improve (DNA 2017d). She is also meant to be confident (Nayak 2017m), a path breaker (Johar 2017d) and unstoppable (Rajani 2017a), all while being "easy, breezy, herself" (Johar 2017a).

The excessive detail about what is expected of young women in relation to their work directly aligns with the established understanding that femininity in particular takes work. The expectations around this hard work in this context extends beyond just a woman's actual performance in her professional role (hard working, focused, versatile) to also include her personality (honest to their work, humble, rational, flexible, poised, sociable) and appearance (pretty, glamorous, sexy, stylish). Furthermore, as a result of the emphasis placed on the masculinity of this space, women are encouraged to work hard at fitting in. Part of this effort is marked by adopting traditionally masculine traits like rationality and assertiveness, which stand in contrast to the traits that women and girls are socialised into adopting in their gender performance from a young age. Additionally, this is also demonstrated through the ways in which much of the success that these women see is engaged via the benchmark of male success.

The male superstars in Bollywood are often understood as the nucleus of the industry and thus hold significant power. As a result, in being the benchmark, the media link compliments of an actress' success to the success of her male colleagues. In being praiseworthy of Alia Bhatt, Deepika Padukone, Priyanka Chopra and Kangana Ranaut, *Bollywood Life*

(Bhattacharjee 2017d) argues that these women can hold their own against the biggest actors in the industry. Without the reference of context, such a statement could be seen as somewhat feminist in that it celebrates the ability of women to stand tall next to men and not feel subordinated. However, contextual knowledge of the industry suggests otherwise. This context not only reminds us how hard it would be for these women to continually assert themselves in the ways that they do but it also tells us that such a statement is not even remotely feminist in nature. The same publication proves this when in another article, it goes on to say of Alia Bhatt, "…despite having Shah Rukh Khan next to her, she managed to shine bright. That proves her calibre as an actress" (Bhattacharjee 2017e). What this says is that as an actress, her calibre is measured in relation to how she fares next to a male superstar. Such a premise further suggests that the scene is set for the male to shine and it is the actress's job to try and keep up in order to be noticed. While Khan is indeed one of the biggest actors and superstars in Bollywood today, the relativity discussed here in terms of Bhatt is absolutely gendered. Therefore, as per the media considered, these women managing to hold their own against the biggest actors in the industry actually speaks to their ability to still get noticed despite being in the presence of superstar actors.

This obsession with the male stars also manifests via the ways in which the media regularly locate the career success of these actresses in relation to big actors and Bollywood family names. Talking about Deepika Padukone, for example, *Bollywood Life* (2017a) writes,

> Lady, you've made it to the top and it isn't an easy road as many would like to believe. You've carved a niche for yourself in an industry that's extremely competitive and ruled by Khans[10] and khandaans[11]. You've managed to be a hero. And yes, you've seen the ups and downs and stood tall.

Not only do they point out her lack of a fairy god father or a famous Bollywood surname to give her an advantage, they also describe her success despite not having any help as something only imaginable for men. This is demonstrated by the way in which they say she has "managed to be a hero", the term used to describe male leads in Bollywood films. Despite celebrating her success, such a compliment comes across as backhanded based on the idea that such a miraculous success is reserved for men.

[10] Some of the biggest male superstars in Bollywood all have the surname Khan and they carry a lot of influence and power

[11] Urdu for Family

It is as a result of these gender politics and hierarchies that Kangana Ranaut, another actress that is credited for achieving success without a famous Bollywood surname or a famous actor opening doors for her, has said that she has no interest in working with the big actors in Bollywood. Her primary reason for this is that she attributes her success to herself and not them. She further explains her choice to not work with the big actors as,

> In a film there's only one hero. There are exceptions of course. Let's talk about a Khan film. Who is the hero in that film? When I have done and working on films that give me the possibility of building a brand of my own individually, it will be stupid of me to go and stand behind someone else and try and encash their popularity… I realized that if in a film, I am not the hero, it will disappoint everyone. It's a very professional strategy that I have adopted. (Bhattacharjee 2017f)

Here, Ranaut not only points out that within films with big actors, actresses are expected to stand behind them in a supporting role, she also makes it clear that she is not interested in doing that kind of work. Actresses are thus becoming increasingly aware of these inequalities and are trying to counter it as best they can within the space allowed by the status quo.

One way this is happening is through the emergence of female centric Bollywood films that focus on women characters and do not have a major male lead. However, the media considered remain problematic in the way they present material in relation to these changes. Of this new trend, *Bollywood Life* writes, "Move over boys of the industry, the divas are taking over!" (DNA 2017b). Again, while women are making strides in the right direction, there are constant reminders in place that the industry as a professional space is not theirs for the taking. *Bollywood Life* suggesting that the actors in the industry need to move over in order for the "divas" to take over demonstrates this. Void of context, some may think such a statement is very empowering in that women are taking their place next to men. In actuality, this is as empowering as postfeminist is feminist. In conversation with other discursive constructs around gender and work, one is able to form a mental puzzle that clearly highlights that a professional space does not belong to women. Furthermore, a word like 'diva' in this context trivialises efforts by women to claim this space. Connotations of such a word suggest that said person is obsessed with appearance and somewhat temperamental in terms of moods. The connotation of such is thus largely negative in nature. This is, therefore, a direct

depiction of the double entanglement, faux empowerment seen in postfeminist culture that McRobbie (2007) speaks about.

### 4.2.2 Everyday work

In addition to placing emphasis on the masculinity of the space as part of rendering women foreign, constant efforts are also made to understand these women via tradition and the domestic space as part of adding to their displacement in the professional space. In this regard, a common patriarchal trope that emerges around these women, work and their (future) domestic responsibilities links to the ways in which they manage or cope with the demands of a career and family. While young women are neither married, nor are they mothers, the link to their domestic life serves as an investment where dividends will pay out in the future. Rather than sudden and major shifts once she marries and has children, the link to the domestic is made early on so as to ensure its inherence by the time she proceeds to the next phases of her life. A woman's connection to the domestic is thus reified and naturalised in this way via the media that work to maintain the hegemonic status quo (Graham and Rich 2014). This conversation is regularly framed in ways that postulate how a woman balances both aspects (career and domestic) of her life. Links can be drawn here to what McRobbie (2007) calls the double entanglement of the postfeminist masquerade, where expectations around empowered women in a postfeminist context exist within clear and more traditionally patriarchal boundaries under the guise of agency. Such instances in the data collected are presented as natural and harmless but nonetheless are seen as problematic from a feminist perspective, especially as these instances are understood in the context of a larger progression of femininity.

Furthermore, in an Indian context, this is especially significant because of the ways in which family is given particular credence in relation to women as flagbearers of Indian culture and tradition. It is the woman who ultimately plays the role of the person who retains honour in society and keeps their family together. Thus, even in youth, a foundational connection to family and domestic life is expected. Time taken to mention Priyanka Chopra's closeness to her mother; Sonam Kapoor's closeness to her sister; as well as Bhumi Pednekar's closeness to her mother is not unintentional. Nor is Priyanka Chopra's declaration about how homesick she feels living away from India and her family (Johar 2017d). These instances not only allow for emphasis to be placed on the importance of family in these women's lives but also

enables the audiences to have some level of familiarity within an everyday-ness that they can easily identify with as an entry way to engaging with additional discourse.

However, specific focus is given to those instances where these young women lack this foundational connection to the domestic as a result of being career women. Implicit in these examples is the fact that a career alone does not fulfil a woman. Demonstrating this, Alia Bhatt explains, "I don't want to be known as an actor. I have told this to my mother many times that I need to have layers to my personality" (PTI 2017b). Though Bhatt was talking about self-fulfilment, this quote within the postfeminist patriarchal context of the media serves a specific purpose. For the media, Bhatt articulating the need for a layered personality is far more effective than an explicit declaration that a career alone is not (good) enough for a woman. Similarly, when discussing some free time that has emerged in her schedule as a result of being between films, Bhatt expressed,

> I have a new home and I'm house-proud. And I love to entertain guests. However, whenever guests drop in I feel inadequate because I am unable to cook for them. Not just that. I want to cook for myself also. I feel it is an essential part of my progress towards a complete life (DNA 2017e).

Highlighting the inability to cook as an inadequacy is significant. While Bhatt may have been making a broader point about independence and self-sufficiency based on her newly independent life outside of her family home, this quote does not exist in isolation. The presentation of this quote and the way in which it is put into conversation with other Bhatt quotes, her overall image as a glamorous and successful actress, and more broadly existing narratives about working women in the media undoubtedly work to highlight the exact inadequacy Bhatt mentions. The actress further suggesting that knowing how to entertain and cook for guests allows for a more well-rounded life again supports this notion. Cooking in particular is seen as a traditionally feminine task (despite everyone needing to eat to survive) and thus highlighting contemporary inadequacies through such an example allows one to draw broader conclusions about contemporary femininities as well.

As a result, knowingly or unknowingly actresses fall into this trope and often end up demonstrating the apparent failure that results from prioritising one's career too much. Jaqueline Fernandez, for example, talks about her unhappiness at all the things she has neglected as a result of concentrating on her career. She explains,

> Um I need to I think get my mojo back *laughs* because I've just been I've just been working too much and it's almost as if I've sacrificed everything in my social life – relationships and family and everything just to work. So, you did a reality show with me so you know every single week I was always like flying here doing that shooting here coming back like I was literally just making it in time to shoot that like episodes with you and um I just yeah, I've completely neglected my social life (Johar 2017b).

There is a sadness noted in Fernandez's statement. While she is actively pursuing a career, it is suggested that the success of this career is seemingly at the expense of her social life, resulting in an isolation of sorts. This aligns with D'Enbeau et al's (2015) assertions that for many Indian women, career success alone is unfulfilling. Furthermore, Fernandez specifically links this to not just family but also her love life, which adds an additional dynamic to this idea of contemporary inadequacies in relation to femininity, as a woman is always encouraged to date as part of gearing up for the next stages of her life. She also explains that she does not know if she could give both a career and personal life all her attention at the same time, as a result of not knowing if she is "a great multitasker" (Johar 2017b). Fernandez presents a struggle with the expectation of contemporary womanhood which dictates that she be able to successfully multitask, as per Hadfield et al. (2007). This in turn emphasises the polarity of having a successful career and domestic life for women. While this may well be her experience, the discourse within such statements are a lot less insignificant than she may think. To the audience who are already made to recognise this tension through similar naturalised narratives in media content, the credibility of such a statement lies in the fact that she is successful professionally yet the record suggests she is single.

The intention behind locating these women in close proximity to the domestic successfully highlights the trade-offs that confront the contemporary Indian woman and the balance she is meant to find. Even if the media is not specifically saying to women that they should not work, by pointing out such imbalances the media are making young women aware of the need to strive for balance, which is especially important in the next stages of her life. Imbalance now can be attributed to naiveté that comes with youth but media content suggests recognising it as a means of rectifying it. The resulting "I don't know how she does it" trope that then emerges often indirectly implies the need for women to make the choice of a smaller juggle often in favour of the domestic. Recognising the need for rectifying such

imbalances early on in a woman's life thus normalises such a patriarchal balance from the onset.

To further support this need for balance, one also witnesses the emergence of narratives that remind both these actresses and women in general that careers in many ways are fleeting. Based on this fleeting nature, it is important for women to have a solid domestic life to fall back on. In the context of Bollywood this emerges around the longevity of the actresses' careers, especially after marriage, as well as their ability to handle success. However, many of the current generation of young women have become increasingly aware of this and often have clear responses and solutions to this issue. That these solutions do not link directly to the domestic does not suit the broader narrative at work. But nonetheless one is able to note the power of agency that is highlighted in postfeminism. This, therefore, appears as somewhat of a loophole in the ways in which postfeminism works to re-inscribe patriarchy. Demonstrating this, Karan Johar asks Priyanka Chopra about this outright on an episode of *Koffee with Karan* (Johar 2017d) that she featured on. He says,

> But tell me, you're doing phenomenally like you've been everywhere god knows you're like, you're like everywhere, you've attended every red carpet, you're presenting awards on the most prolific platforms. You're like on every lead talk show. The world knows you, it must feel phenomenal, when you wake up what does it feel like? Um, you have to kind of feel like an achiever I know, but is it also daunting, do you feel afraid on certain days that this could all just go away one day? (Johar 2017d)

Priyanka responds to this stating,

> Ya but I've always known that. I knew that the day that I walked into movies right in the beginning because I've never had any help Karan from anyone. Everything that I have done, whether it's what I've done in America, whether it's what I've done in India, the people I've worked with, the characters that I've worked on that has all been mine so I've always known that it's, it was not something, I'm not entitled, it didn't come to me so it can go away… Which is why I've always been someone who does multiple things. Like I'm a producer now. I'm producing here, I'm producing in America as well. (Johar 2017d)

This exchange is especially significant within the Bollywood context, specifically where the longevity of careers is primarily a conversation directed at women who were expected to quit the industry after marriage while men have extended careers, experiencing their prime even

into their 50s. Additionally, fame is fleeting regardless of the industry. Chopra presents an awareness of this in her response but nonetheless rejects this sexism as an indicator that she should stop working. Rather, she actively pursues a variety of career pathways concurrently.

The link to marriage however is especially interesting. When these actresses articulate some awareness around the issue of longevity, much of this is linked to marriage as a result of the Bollywood context and the past expectations of married actresses. Alia Bhatt, for example, explains:

> I want to settle down early in life because I have an advantage of having started off (in career) very early. That way (getting married), I can get done with it and continue (in my career). Also I don't want to settle down too late in life because that also has its own issues. But honestly, I am not thinking about it or planning as of now (Rajani 2017j).

While she does locate herself within the expected trajectory in noting that she does indeed want to settle down, this does not mean she intends to stop working. Her choice of words in relation to her future marriage as "get done with it" are especially interesting. This is because Bhatt on the one hand implies that is something that may be important to her but on the other hand is not the most important thing to her. She clearly intends to continue working even after getting married. This is indeed a newly emerging trend in Bollywood as it was within the last ten to fifteen years that married women have continued acting in Bollywood films in lead roles. Speaking about this on Koffee with Karan (Johar 2017d), Priyanka Chopra says,

> Like you see Aishwariya, you see Bebo (Kareena Kapoor Khan), you see Kajol. You see so many actors who are married and yet enjoy complete superstardom which they haven't lost at all. Kudos to India for at least reaching that point.

Noting successful examples of actresses who continued acting even after marriage and motherhood demonstrates the shift Chopra is discussing. She, therefore, concludes her point on the subject, noting that "Whether I'm married or not. I have worked always, irrespective of my relationships or not um but and I don't think marriage will change that. Ever" (Johar 2017d). This determination on the part of these young women is a successful sign of the times, resulting in the need for the media to engage the issue of locating women within the domestic differently. Similarly, like Chopra, Alia Bhatt explains,

> Earlier we used to say that an actress' shelf life lasts only until she gets married. But I don't think that's true anymore. That has completely changed especially with the way Bebo has gone about her marriage and even her pregnancy. Even after getting married, she did really well in a few tough films. And now, although she delivered a baby a few months back, she is readying to get back to shooting. I think that's the way it should be for an actor. You shouldn't stop to acting just because you settle down, and I also don't plan to go that way (Rajani 2017j).

The current generation of young women are, therefore, actively countering this through a determination to continue working as long as they wish. In many ways, one can note somewhat of a shift towards a more western disposition that is more encouraging of individual agency. Media content that is located within a postfeminist outlook would likely struggle with the outward discouragement of such determination. Relying on traditional tropes of an explicit battle between the domestic and professional lives of women is, therefore, dated in such contemporary discourse. Through the analysis of the data there are thus two ways in which the media actively counter these acts of agency. The first links to emphasising the need for a good WLB, as these women transition into the next stages of their lives. The second and more directly applicable to these young women links to policing their vocality.

### 4.2.3 Vocal work

These policing attempts cannot be outwardly explicit, especially in a postfeminist context where agency and empowerment are emphasised. The media, therefore, work to encourage some attempts at empowered agency so as not to appear regressive when emphasising the boundaries of such attempts. Looking first at the vocality that is encouraged, much of this discourse focuses on wanting these actresses to recognise the power of their fame. In doing this, these actresses are often encouraged to speak out about issues affecting other women so as to not only raise awareness but also perform their gender in ways that highlight their empowered agency. Explaining this further, *Bollywood Life* (2017d) writes,

> Coming to Bollywood, our actresses are often looked up as role models by many youngsters, and that's why their every actions and quote are often scrutinized minutely by everyone. Thankfully most of them have been able to conduct themselves pretty well in the public eye, and have done some inspiring work both on and off screen, be it with how they handled their career, social work or their own personal lives.

Despite ignoring their role in this process of scrutiny, the publication speaks to the impact and influence these women have on the audience. Based on this, it is assumed that these women becoming increasingly vocal is a good thing. So, when Deepika Padukone publicly discussed her struggle with depression despite being a very successful actress the publication lauded her. Of this they wrote,

> For a top-actress to come out and talk about her mental health – it requires guts. Deepika did not shy away from talking about her mental health on national TV, and made us all she (sic) a tear along with her…Her words, on the TV appearance with her consultant were enough to give on (sic) power to speak up and not see oneself as a victim, but her words are not all that is there for help. The actress went out of her way and started a foundation… (Tripathi 2017a).

Emphasising her role as a celebrity in this process, the publication notes "we absolutely need our role models to speak up on topics that can cultivate change in the society" (Tripathi 2017a). Such a point proves interesting when considering the role the media plays in society. Seemingly aware of the importance of their role, the publication regularly expressed the expectation of wanting actresses to speak out explicitly and genuinely on specific issues.

As a result, *Bollywood Life* was impressed with Shraddha Kapoor, Ileana D'Cruz, Disha Patani, and Anushka Sharma for speaking out against molestation in India. However, in contrast to this they were less impressed with the likes of Alia Bhatt and Sonam Kapoor (despite speaking out on similar issues in the past) for not speaking out. With a tinge of skepticism, the publication argues,

> The reason for me to mention these three is that they had movie releases in recent times, where they had spoken about the problems women have been facing. But when there is actual issue at hand, and no releases of theirs surrounding it, they chose to not be verbal, despite having huge social media presence. So is Twitter only to be used when there is a movie of yours to be released? We are not saying that their one tweet can change the mentality of the MCP-world. But if it can make at least one percent of their fans think in the right way, that's still something for the better…So please, people, speak up! the nation needs you in these moments (BollywoodLife 2017b).

In addition to wanting actresses to speak out on these issues, the publication also expresses unhappiness when these instances coincide with film promotions. Their argument is that only speaking about issues when there is a film to promote thus using the issue to gain publicity

for a film lacks authenticity and care. This stands in stark contrast to the expectation that women are meant to be naturally empathetic and keen to do care work as part of performing their gender successfully. Additionally, establishing and fostering an authentic and caring connection between the audience and celebrity is important in the process of celebrity culture and influence.

Demonstrating the importance of this connection, *Bollywood Life* (Chauhan 2017c) talks about the experiences of Disha Patani who was slut shamed online for wearing an outfit that was deemed too revealing. Of this experience, they write,

> It's funny to see when in a country like ours celebs like Disha Patani can't escape the slut shaming, just imagine the plight of a common woman and what they go through in their day to day lives. Trying to avoid and escape the lecherous eyes of those who called themselves 'humans' (Chauhan 2017c).

Such a quote then not only problematises Patani's experience but also locates this experience within the realm of the personal for the audience. Thus, the expectation for these women to be vocal about issues like these links to the need to raise awareness of these social issues but also to the need for establishing a connection between the audience and the celebrity

Ironically though, in focusing on the need for these actresses to raise awareness on these issues, the media considered seem to absolve themselves in the processes that promote patriarchy that further enable these issues. As active contributors to the socialisation process, the media are major culprits in the maintenance and extension of the status quo. For example, *Bollywood Life* recalled Deepika Padukone's objection to *The Times of India* circulating a picture of her taken from above, with a circle around her cleavage. The actress tweeted a response to the picture saying "Yes! I am a woman. I have breasts and a cleavage! You got a problem!!?? Don't talk about women's empowerment when you don't know how to respect women!" (Chauhan 2017a). As such, *Bollywood Life* (2017a) suggest that the actress's "big fight with Times of India on the cleavage controversy made the actress a poster girl for feminism. The actress took on the national daily and called out their sexist attitude". What is not clear in this instance is where this publication locates itself. Throughout the data collected, this publication in specific writes in ways that transcend a variety of boundaries. At times they adopt the position of an audience member, or a protector of the audience, or the media amongst other roles. It further appears that this is done to absolve them of their role in

the circulation of this culture thereby not bringing their position as a reliable source of content (and identity development) into question.

Expressing frustration with this culture, Disha Patani responded to the shaming she experienced online saying,

> Wake up and start accepting that we are not going to be anybody's idea of an 'Indian girl'. Don't let your frustration destroy somebody's life because you won't be happy if it happens in your own family! Stop this hypocrisy and open your mind! (Chauhan 2017c).

This is especially interesting in relation to the ways in which Patani raises issues of Indian femininity specifically. She notes ideals of Indian femininity and implies the stifling nature of these ideals. In the Indian context, this is very much an ideal that the media themselves circulate; so for any mainstream publication or platform to absolve themselves from this role is interesting. While Patani does not outright reject Indianness she rejects an Indian ideal that leans more heavily on the traditional rather than modern disposition. More broadly, such an example links to and highlights actresses' frustrations with sexism and misogyny within the media. This leads to many actresses voicing these frustrations and speaking out against such thinking, as seen with the Padukone and Patani examples above.

However, what is also clear is that the media considered have a very limited understanding of these issues. In many ways, this aligns with the postfeminist nature of contemporary times, where gender equality and so on is emphasised. Yet when instances of inequality appear, people are unable to properly comprehend or unpack these issues. One witnesses this when looking at how *Bollywood Life* frames Women's Day in India, as well as the need for gender equality within the context. In one article, they suggest,

> International Women's day is finally here, not that we feel women need a special day to celebrate their greatness. There are many gorgeous and sexy women out there who are completely unaware about their greatness (Nandrajog 2017a).

Seemingly left intentionally ambiguous (likely based on an inability to grasp the crux of these issues but also to absolve themselves of any problematic statements if ever questioned), through coupling a woman's greatness with adjectives that describe her appearance such as "gorgeous" and "sexy", it is clear that the publication is reducing women to their appearance

and ignoring the plethora of issues they continue to face in contemporary society. Further demonstrating this, in another article they assert,

> With the times changing and women owning the industry like bawses, there's barely room for lack of gender equality. However, still, even to this day, divas claim that the particular peril consists (Iyengar 2017p).

This is extremely problematic, but directly in line with a postfeminist understanding of the time. In this quote, they do not just dismiss the idea of continued gender inequality, they also dismiss those that maintain that inequality exists. While no specific names are given in this instance, the use of the term divas to describe these individuals is telling. As noted above, the link to divas being individuals who are focused on their appearance and moody also raises connotations of a person who is unnecessarily demanding and brattish. This allows one to slowly realise that the media's need for these actresses to vocalise their experiences exists in very clear boundaries that are not necessarily about raising awareness about interventions to thwart patriarchal thought and practice. This kind of shallow generic engagement with key issues is not too damaging to the status quo but nonetheless give audiences additional channels within which they can connect with these celebrities who are likely articulating experiences that resonate.

It is because of this that when an actress does move beyond these clearly laid boundaries of vocality, they are policed. Sonam Kapoor for example is described in one article as an "opinionated actress" who "has also stood up for women empowerment on several occasions" (Iyengar 2017q). The often-negative connotation of the adjective opinionated particularly in relation to women must be noted here. On its own, one may overlook such an adjective as merely noting the actress's outspoken nature. However, in conjunction with the ways in which other actresses, who are also criticised for being too vocal, one realises the broader narrative at work. Adding to this narrative, Kangana Ranaut is described as a "diva" who "is the ambassador for women empowerment" and someone who fights patriarchy through being vocal about issues women face (Iyengar 2017r and Chaurasia 2017). Similarly in another instance, they also describe her as,

> the kind of woman who speaks her heart out. And once again, she hits the nail on the head as she states how men find it intimidating to be with stronger women (Iyengar 2017g).

As with Kapoor, Ranaut is also presented through the image of someone who has many opinions and speaks a lot. The words used in these instances all work together to paint a very specific picture about the women that call into question the status quo too much. Despite this, Ranaut has largely remained vocal about standing up to her experiences of male chauvinism particularly in her industry, while also critiquing issues within masculinity in general. She asserts,

> Bold, stubborn women, who are achievers, are desirable only to those who are strong and assured. (For some men) it's frightening to handle a woman who can speak her mind. Thankfully, that's not true for everyone. Courage is often endearing and rare (Iyengar 2017g).

Aware of some of the gender narratives at play, Ranaut's analysis of these issues is thus often a lot more in depth compared to what one sees elsewhere in these circles. It is, therefore, not surprising that *Bollywood Life* feels that the actress is too outspoken at times. Speaking about how Ranaut recognises and asserts her responsibility as a celebrity, they argue,

> with great power comes great responsibilities and while Kangana has marched around talking about her struggles and making it big without the support of Khans or any Bollywood 'camps', she seems to have forgotten that sometimes, silence is more dignified a reply (Iyengar 2017r).

The preference for silence in this regard is telling. This then highlights the contradiction with the expectation of celebrities to speak up while also demonstrating the generally shallow nature of the active citizenry that is expected of celebrities. They should speak but not too much. They should engage issues but not be too scathing. The boundaries of this shallow engagement with empowerment, as per the trend, is thus made clear. These boundaries call for vocality that is just enough to establish links of relatability between the audience and the actress without prompting deeper reflections that question the same status quo the media supports in other ways.

When actresses are overly vocal on these issues, the media chastises them and demonstrates the consequences for those that question societal hegemonies. As a result, this does not happen very often because Bollywood as an industry is about popularity, meaning that not many actresses are willing to risk their popularity with excessive bad press. Nonetheless, the one person that did this without hesitation was Ranaut. Talking about the actress's vocal approach when doing press events, *Bollywood Life* (Bhattacharjee 2017g) wrote, "Kangana

Ranaut just can't steal herself away from courting controversies" Describing her actions as controversial and her personality as one that seemingly enjoys the attention that controversy brings, delegitimises, or at least attempts to delegitimise what the actress says. So, when Ranaut got into a public argument with Karan Johar about comments she made on his show, the media considered ultimately framed it in ways that highlighted Ranaut's vocality as problematic. Keeping the earlier quote in mind that suggested that sometimes silence was better, one sees *Bollywood Life* (Rajani 2017g) adopt a similar stance when suggesting,

> Kangana has had a fallout with quite a few filmmakers too and she has always been unapologetic about it. Don't you think that this could, in turn, affect her Bollywood career in the near future?

Such a statement and observation works to do two things. First, it paints Ranaut as troublesome and cantankerous, creating an implicit understanding that her statements hold little validity as a result of her nature. Second, it also reminds both Ranaut and any other women in the audience that such behaviour and deviant femininity is likely to have tangible and long–lasting consequences. In the context of a career, these consequences would impact on its success, thereby reiterating the gendered power dynamics of the space. As a result, within these media texts, the lessons about who should and should not be vocal when wronged by the status quo is clear. Women are reminded of this not just in how they are encouraged to conduct themselves in a work environment but also in terms of how their presence conveniences or inconveniences the men around them.

Furthermore, implicit in this data is the idea that much of this seemingly problematic vocality can be attributed to a youthful boisterousness. Part of policing the likes of Ranaut is more broadly linked to regaining order in the status quo. Women engaging this content are reminded of the need to 'settle down' before they settle down. While not necessarily discouraged from enjoying work, the way in which media content discusses a young woman's relationship with work tells audiences that ideal femininity in this context is actually about understanding the limitations that come with this more empowered embodiment of gender. Rather than long term independence, women are made to realise the importance of opting for spurts of independence based solely on what the domestic situation allows. Understanding that from a young age bodes well for her future, as she marries and has children.

## *4.3 Wives*

### 4.3.1 Working after marriage

The biggest issue that begins to emerge in data about actresses who are wives in relation to their work is that of work life balance. While the amount of content around this topic is limited, the discursive constructs around femininity of wives clearly points to the need for balance between professional and domestic lives. The implied tension between these two facets of life for women is amplified for the actresses who are wives. While this tension is not proclaimed explicitly in a postfeminist era of faux empowerment, the implications are clear. Focus is placed on the way in which these women's marriages influence their stance on work. These implications are firmly located within the postfeminist matrix that suggests that a woman realigns with traditional understandings of femininity once she finds a man to marry and eventually marries him (Gill & Herdieckrhoff 2006). Furthermore, considering the perceived traditional masculinity of work outside the home, the displacement (both implicit and explicit) of women in this space works in favour of these traditional understandings. It is in this regard that Baker (2012) points out that traditionally, women were understood as being content as a housewife while her husband pursued economic interests outside of the house. McRobbie (2007: 772) further reiterates this point in pointing out that women are meant to be completely fine with the "limited economic participation" afforded to them. It is thus further suggested that feminist scholars should not be surprised if this acceptance of tradition is asserted as demonstrations of agency in postfeminist era. In an Indian context, this link to tradition is further intensified when considering the significance of tradition in relation to ideal Indian femininity. The additional importance of family for Indian women means that as per the media, the tensions between a woman's career and her domestic life is all the greater. As such, the immediate and affective expectation for these women when faced with a choice between family and a career is that they will choose family.

Demonstrating this, attempts are made in the data considered to naturalise the narrative of happy wives leaving the professional space to focus on the domestic. Here immediate emphasis is also placed on working towards starting a family once the focus on the domestic has been established. This is seen in two specific instances in relation to actresses Asin[12] and

[12] While the actress has subsequently had a child, during the data collection period her pregnancy was not announced as so data around the actress during this period remains in the wife category.

Bipasha Basu. Talking about Asin first, on the occasion of her first wedding anniversary *Bollywood Life* (Rajani 2017c) worked to highlight the happiness of Asin and her husband both generally and in their union. This aligns with the actress's own Instagram post about her anniversary, where she suggests that marriage completes an individual (simply.asin 2017). *Bollywood Life* thus recounted "I am sure that it has been a wonderful journey so far for the lovely couple" (Rajani 2017c). Later in the same article, it is also noted that, "Asin officially made an announcement that she wouldn't continue to act in films once she got married. Well, we miss seeing you on the celluloid!" Despite the publication saying that they miss seeing the actress on screen, this is done after establishing an extremely positive picture about the actress's married life. This seems especially intentional because of the fact that publication hardly publishes stories about actresses who are married and yet they dedicated an entire article to the happiness of a former actress' marriage. What this does is to naturalise discourse around the relationship for women between happy marriages and letting go of a career. Making a connection between this point and the contrasting inadequacies that where highlighted when the likes of Alia Bhatt and Jaqueline Fernandez prioritised their career demonstrates the way in which these publications subtly push audiences in certain directions based on the implication of happiness and so on.

A similar normalisation is noted with Bipasha Basu who, according to the media considered, is experiencing great happiness and good fortune as a result of getting married. Described as a "gorgeous wifey" (Rajani 2017e), *Bollywood Life* (Bannerjee 2017c) go as far as to suggest that "we are sure many girls would envy her". Establishing this connection of desire also assists in normalising the surrounding expectations. While it has never explicitly been stated that Basu left the industry like Asin, the media does make it clear that she is slowing down. With emphasis placed on an established romance and happiness, *Bollywood Life* (Iyengar 2017aa) suggests,

> Moreover, the diva is planning to start a family soon. That does (sic) mean she is pregnant per say, but that she wants to start trying for a baby. A source close to the actress recently spilled the beans on her family planning. 'She is only attending events and has informed her team that she does not want to take up any new projects at the moment because she wants to focus on starting a family', stated the source.

The link here to having babies is especially important for a number of reasons. Even though marriage is presented as very important to women, it works as more of a crucial formality to begin re-securing women within more patriarchal thoughts and practices. Having children is presented as a lot more important than marriage alone, so even in discourse about these actresses who are wives but not yet mothers the media regularly speculate actively about impending pregnancies. All via an unnamed source, the narrative that emerges as a result of this impending pregnancy is that Basu has slowed down in terms of signing new films. While not completely avoiding work, Basu slowing down aligns quite clearly with the idea that a career directly threatens the success of a domestic life thereby opting for more balance. While the choice remains Basu's to make, that this balance is made to sound healthy and well-rounded is where on recognises efforts to normalise the same in the media considered. As such, what the examples of Asin and particularly Basu show us is that in actual fact this preferred balance is more an imbalance toward the domestic. So, while an overt focus on her career is presented as unfulfilling and problematic, rather than critique of this coming across as a policing of women it is rather justified within narratives of balance. However, upon further inspection when looking at discourse around these married women it is actually an imbalance in favour of the domestic that is encouraged.

## *4.4 Mothers*

### 4.4.1 Balance

This balanced imbalance is then completely favoured by the time these women are mothers. At this stage, while it is never explicitly said that actresses that are mothers should no longer work, much of the discursive work in the media is about how these women manage the demands of their family as their first priority. The implicit understanding here is that these women do not have the luxury of favouring their career in the same way that, for example, Bhatt and Fernandez do, as young women. Furthermore, expectations around motherhood places various additional pressures on women, resulting in what Green (2015) terms the need for 'intensive mothering'. Here she notes the dedication that is expected of mothers is such that they should look after their children better than they look after themselves. Minnotte (2016) describes the expected ideal mothering that circulates in media discourse in contemporary times as active, ongoing and rigorous. In a postfeminist context, this is also coupled with the expectation of idealised gender performances that emphasise the need for hyper femininity. What this results in is various ways in which women are policed beyond

just their own bodies but also in relation to how their actions impact on those around them. Furthermore, in the context of motherhood and work, not meeting the expectations on these women is presented as impacting on their children and family.

It is not surprising therefore that data was collected that engages with the anxieties these actresses face when deciding to go back to work after having children. A common observation within the media considered is the way in which they highlight the fact that although the actresses took time away from work to have and raise children, they only returned to work when the children were old enough. Old enough varied from actress to actress, where some understood this as teenage children while others understood it as toddlers. Speaking about Rani Mukerji, *Bollywood Life* (DNA 2017a) writes,

> Rani was last seen in Mardaani, after which she went on a maternity break. Now that her daughter Adira is over a year old, the actress is gearing up to face the cameras once again.

This then highlights that Mukerji took a full year to be with her child before considering new projects. Similarly, Raveena Tandon also took a break from the industry once she and her husband started having children. Of Tandon's return *Bollywood Life* (Mahesh 2017) writes,

> post her marriage with film distributor Anil Thandani Raveena has been busy with her two kids. But now her kids are grown up and she is ready to take on more work in all fields.

With both Mukerji and Tandon, these observations work to normalise the extended break these women take to be with their children. Where the original idea of WLB is one that is meant to enable people to find a balance between work and other facets of life, what these examples show is that letting go of work in favour of meeting all the domestic demands a woman faces is encouraged in the Indian context. Void of background, the fact that these women can stop working because they can afford to do so is completely ignored. Nonetheless, the implication is clear, that only when children do not need as much attention is it okay for these women to venture back into the working world. However, once this happens, as part of being a good and caring mother, these women are also encouraged to regularly perform and articulate their guilt and the anxieties that come with leaving their family and returning to work. This works to further point out the ways in which women that work, particularly after marriage and motherhood, are not the norm. This is clearly

demonstrated through an article about Aishwariya Rai, where *Bollywood Life* (2017d) explains,

> She came out of an abusive relationship with grace, she got married in a great family, and continued to do films even after being a mother, and she is still one of the most in-demand actresses in the industry.

Here, specific attention is given to the fact that she continued working *even* after becoming a mother. This suggests a deviance of sorts, which is why it appears that the media considered expect these women to present some form of conflict, guilt, or anxiety when opting to return to work.

Demonstrating this in an example about Kajol, the trade-off that occurs when returning to work is made clear. *Bollywood Life* (Nayak 2017h) explains that when promoting her comeback film in 2015, the actress spoke about discussing these trade-offs with her daughter who nonetheless encouraged her to make the return. She said,

> In fact, she convinced me. She was like 'Mom you have to do this film' and I was like, 'Baby I'm going to be out of town, I'm going to go for this outdoor, I'm not going to spend time with you' (Nayak 2017h).

Locating this anxiety within the tension between the professional and the domestic for women works as an affective reminder of the implications of such decisions. The articulation of these anxieties works to justify the need for the noted imbalance, where even if working, the actresses must make extra effort to give all their additional time to their domestic life. The challenge therein is rarely acknowledged. Rather, such sacrifice is expected as a result of making the choice to return to work. *Bollywood Life* (Iyengar 2017t) normalises this in an article, where they make mention of and affirm the ways in which Aishwariya Rai takes her roles as mother, wife and daughter seriously. In this example, it is noted that Rai's father is ill in hospital. The publication thus explains,

> A spokesperson exclusively told us, 'Yes he (Krishnaraj Rai) has been in hospital for the nearly two weeks. Aishwariya is taking care of him despite her being alone as Abhishek[13] was in New York for work. He just got back. Recently at Aaradhya's

[13] The actress's husband who is also an actor.

> sports day, Aishwariya was seen cheering for the kids and her own daughter too. But simultaneously she was also keeping a tab on her dad's health' (Iyengar 2017t).

A tone of pride is immediately noted when Rai is implicitly celebrated for her dedication towards the domestic. While she does work, had she been working on a more full time basis she would not have been able to commit to all these domestic demands in this way. Additionally, what is also striking in this quote is the fact that her husband has been away on work. That her partner was away is never presented as a tension, as it is the norm for men to be away for work while women take care of the domestic responsibilities. While it is not clear what his role is when he is home, the mention of a husband leaving home for work is part of what is normalised in this narrative. Regardless of circumstances, successful femininity is that which properly takes care of the domestic despite its various challenges.

Furthermore, still within the Rai example, mention of the actress cheering for her child at a school sports event, despite the stress of knowing her father was ill in hospital, also speaks to the active mothering that is expected of women today (Minnotte 2016). Focus is also placed on highlighting the fun times mother's share with their children. This is directly in line with assertions by Hadfield et al. (2007) that dominant media narratives around contemporary parenting suggest the need for parents to befriend their children while also parenting them. This works to normalise the active parenting style that warrants the need for specifically mothers to be home with their children. *Bollywood Life* (Nayak 2017j), for example, highlights the fun-filled relationship between Kajol and her daughter that makes them the "cutest mother-daughter duo in B-town". In further elaborating on this particular relationship, the publication notes that they are "more like siblings than mother-daughter". While having a good relationship with one's child is indeed a positive, the nuances of the expectations placed on women in these contexts demonstrate the way in which they are meant to do many things at the same time. With so much expected of a modern mother, an understanding emerges that further divisions of a woman's time as a result of a career hamper the potential success of meeting these domestic expectations.

As such, when it is perceived that one of these actresses is not properly dedicating her time and energy to her child, the media will be sure to point it out. Somebody who ignored these expectations was new mother Kareena Kapoor Khan. Kapoor Khan was one of the first Bollywood actresses to continue living her life as an actress in the public eye throughout her

pregnancy. As a result, the media was both intrigued and complimentary of the actress for her conduct during her pregnancy. The intentional shift towards also defining the actress as a mother proves interesting when considering the ideological work such coverage does. The actress herself assists in this regard explaining,

> Motherhood is going to be the best phase of my life. I am super excited. It has just been 46 days so, I don't know about the change but yeah now your heart doesn't beat inside you, it is outside in someone else's body. When you look at your baby, you realise that (Iyengar 2017i).

Noteworthy here is the emphasis placed on the utmost importance of motherhood in a woman's life. However, the coverage of the actress changed slightly when she slowly rejected the expectations placed on new mothers as per the hegemonic status quo. Not only did Kapoor Khan return to work within a year of giving birth to her child, she also did not stop living her pre-motherhood life, socialising, spending time with her husband and so on. While she herself recognised her new role as a mother, the media felt that she was not doing so well enough, assumedly because she was not with her baby on a full-time basis. In one instance, she and her husband were pictured at a friend's party until the early hours of the morning. Less than impressed, *Bollywood Life* (Iyengar 2017k) exclaims,

> Having a baby means letting go all your social plans or time for intimacy with your partner. However, Kareena Kapoor Khan and Saif Ali Khan are breaking stereotypes here as well we'd say. With baby Taimur being their new responsibility, the couple are doing a fine job balancing between time for baby and socializing.

Alone this comment may seem somewhat complimentary based on the suggestion that the actress and her husband are able to find a balance between parenting and socialising. However, questions emerge when considering that the quote begins by noting a supposed norm, where partners *usually* are unable to keep up a social and romantic life with a new baby. When considering this quote with other examples of such observations it then becomes clear that the publication is indeed subtly shaming the actress.

In another instance, *Bollywood Life* (Iyengar 2017v) points out that the actress is travelling overseas without her child. They write,

> We just spotted Kareena Kapoor Khan at the airport sans Taimur! Okay, not that it's the first time that the actress has walked out of the house without her gorgeous baby

boy. However, this time it's different. The diva was spotted at the airport without her son heading for London.

Much like the first example, here too the observations are seemingly normal. However, when one looks at them together, the publication is actually questioning the actress for leaving the house without her child repeatedly. Further cause for concern in the eyes of the publication is that this time the actress is travelling overseas without her baby. Questioning the actress's presence as a mother highlights the expectation that mothers are meant to forgo all other accomplishment as soon as they have a child, thus ensuring that all their time is given to the child, especially when the child is very young. These examples show the ways in which women who do not live up to the hegemonic expectations of working mothers are subtly questioned about their deviations from the norm.

## *4.5 Conclusion*

In conclusion, what this theme demonstrates to audiences is the tension between the professional work of these actresses and their responsibilities in relation to domestic life and particularly motherhood. The emerging trajectory gives the most freedom to younger actresses who are able to focus a lot more on their careers as a result of not having a husband or child, however this shifts as she marries. In order to phase this shift into young women, the media still remind audiences about the importance of the domestic in the lives of women. By the time she marries, she is then not unaware of the expectation that domestic responsibilities become an even more important part of her life. Marriage re-introduces tradition into a woman's life and hegemonic notions of a successful marriage suggest recognising this tradition in clear ways. Work life balance becomes a more important issue to these women, where they need to now also focus on domestic responsibilities as part of keeping their husband happy. Through analysing the data, one realises that in this context, rather than a balance between work and home life, the ideal of an imbalance that favours the domestic begins to emerge. Starting to accept these more traditional expectations sets the tone for the next phase of her life, motherhood. Once she becomes a mother, more tradition is re-inscribed in her life. Here, women are encouraged to focus exclusively on the domestic at the expense of their career, as part of being a good wife and mother. While many everyday women may not be able to afford to or want to stay at home in this way, what these narratives do is present a normalised benchmark of femininity. Through this benchmark that is widely circulated in mainstream spaces, women are forced to recognise similarities and differences

to their own lives. Furthermore, through these discourses, they are able to recognise what is circulated as social norms. Even if they cannot meet these norms, being aware of the pressures of these norms suggests some influence in their own gender performance. This is especially significant considering the ways in which these norms actively maintain and extend patriarchal thought and practice.

# Chapter 5: Bodily Femininity

## *5.1 Bodily femininity*

In noting that gender is a social construct, gender performance is learned. Butler (1993) introduces the term performativity to better understand gender performance in contemporary contexts. Butler argues that various social, cultural, political and economic factors work together to shape and regulate gender performance in society around hegemonic norms. She explains that we should engage:

> …the understanding of performativity not as the act by which a subject brings into being what she/he names, but, rather, as the reiterative power of discourse to produce the phenomena that it regulates and constrains… (Butler 1993: 02).

Salih (2002) argues that gender is not simply an identity that one inherits, but rather is something one does. Understanding this performativity as an action, demonstrates the active processes that are involved when engaging issues of gender. Fournier (2002) observes that in these processes, individuals are made to recognise and cherish an independence as part of personally and successfully locating themselves within society. Despite the apparent fluidity in relation to the independence of this process, Salih (2002) elaborates on Butler's emphasising that there isn't much freedom involved. Based on the systemic ways in which hegemonic notions are maintained, the contextual boundaries of gender performance are well created, and made deeply inherent over time. Schlichter (2011) describes this inherence as discursive, noting that these hegemonic boundaries of gender performance are maintained discursively in society. She argues that such an understanding,

> …captures the construction and naturalization of gender through language, especially the linguistic act of interpellation. Its meaning, produced through the spoken…*word* and the situation of address, expresses a critique of naturalized notions of heteronormative gender (Schlichter 2011: 32).

Resultantly, considering the ways in which women's bodies are constructed and discussed in the mainstream media becomes important when wanting to understand notions of femininity that are disseminated to audiences. This is especially key because as Fournier (2002: 55) notes, the body is located "within networks of social, moral and cultural orders…[where] contradictions within the social are lived in the body and are marked on bodies as 'life-lesions'". Building on this, Notman (2003: 578) observes the closely linked issue of a girl's body and her "internal experiences and their meanings". From a young age, the hegemonic

*success* of the female body is tied to how she understands herself. The personal understanding of a woman's body, and by default herself, is directly influenced by how she relates to the world at large and in turn how the world relates to her. Notman argues that "these responses eventually are incorporated into her image of herself. Like self-esteem, the self-image arises in part from the communications from others, which are internalized" (2003: 578). Adding to this on a macro level, Chambers (2007) suggests that it is through these engagements with societal hegemony and power that the body is discursively materialised. Through this process, the body emerges as an important "site for theoretical and political problematizing" (Chambers 2007: 53). This is especially important because the body ends up being the basis from and within which gender occurs. It is through the body in its physical form that gender engages with society and thereby finds meaning in this process (Butler 2004). Through this understanding Butler defines the body as "that which can occupy the norm in myriad ways, exceed the norm, rework the norm, and expose realities to which we thought we were confined as open to transformation" (2004: 217).

In a contemporary context then, issues of the body often emerge and unfold in the mainstream media around content about celebrities and popular culture. The prevalence of content around celebrities and popular culture speaks to the ways in which the media frame these issues so that they resonate with audiences and maintain the hegemonies from which gender is performed. As such, relating to the body, Featherstone (2010) observes that much of the content about celebrities focuses on their fitness and appearance; in particular, how they maintain both while balancing the demands of contemporary life. Marshall (2010: 36) argues that,

> Celebrity taught generations how to engage and use consumer culture to 'make' oneself…Because of celebrity's centrality in what can be defined as self-production, the elaborate celebrity gossip can be seen as providing a continuity of discourse around the presentation of the self for public consumption.

Here specific focus is put on the female celebrity, her body and appearance. Femininity is understood as something that requires constant work and so these celebrity women are presented in ways that demonstrate that work. While there are a variety of instances where these women are presented as exemplary performers of femininity who do the gender work well, Hirdman (2017) focuses specifically on those instances where celebrity women fail to live up to the hegemonic standard. Hirdman argues that those famous women that fail to meet

the standard "appear in popular culture as objects of cultural derision in different contextual settings" (2017: 367). Featherstone (2010) in turn notes that while special attention is paid to these divergences, media discourse also highlights the ways in which effort is made to correct these perceived wrongs. He explains, "Body maintenance, diet and fitness regimes, or the latest therapy expert or guru, are at hand to put them back on the road to self-improvement" (2010: 201). Such discourse then reemphasises the standard of perfection for the audience. Hirdman (2017: 368) explains that, "notions of 'the perfect' serve as a technique to create a competitive self for young women". Featherstone adds to this, noting the emergence and maintenance of a societal culture that highlights the importance of appearance (2010).

However, in these considerations around gender, the body and the way in which the media uses celebrities to maintain specific hegemonies, a number of issues emerge. In particular, Fournier (2002) problematises the way in which the body is often discussed theoretically. She argues that, despite the complexities in relation to how the body and gender are intrinsically linked, the body is often presented as "the passive recipient or bearer of inscriptions" void of any emotional awareness of the power dynamics it engages (2002: 57). While the discursive issues highlighted through the example of celebrity are indeed important, it is not enough. Black (2011) attributes this to basic understandings of communication that assume power is only transferred via the linguistic. Rather, he supports a shift "away from the realm of simple physical or biological fact and into that of perception and interaction" (2011: 05). This is a shift away from the literal and a shift towards affect. By re-centring the affective, one is able to re-engage issues of "sensation, memory, perception, attention and listening" (Blackman and Venn 2010: 08). Hirdman (2017: 368) argues that,

> The affective dimension is that which sustains the connection between ideas, values and objects, involving traces of past impressions. Affect, in other words, always has cultural weight and even the most apparently direct sensation experienced in contact with images relies on histories of reading that come before the encounter…

Blackman and Venn (2010) note that such a shift is important because often the body's ability to affect and be affected is forgotten. How the body is traditionally studied is, therefore, limited in the ways in which focus was placed on the literal. Rather, these texts should be understood in relation to their "affective register and that there is a language that exceeds the image that captures this operation" (2010: 24). Featherstone (2010: 209) further

adds that the shift towards the affective also enables one to "distinguish the intensity of an image, its affective potential, from its content". Adding to this, Blackman and Venn (2010) discuss the importance of relationality vis-a-vis this shift towards the affective. They describe relationality as the way in which one is able to understand issues in intersecting rather than exclusive ways. Engaging affect moves away from rigid understandings of life and its issues, favouring an understanding that foregrounds "how practices mobilize, connect up and distribute relations of entanglement among people, places, entities and objects which might be characterized more by fixity than movement" (Blackman and Venn 2010: 15).

To further understand the importance of this affective shift for this project, one can revisit the issue of celebrity content about women's bodies in the mainstream media. As noted, Featherstone (2010) explains that the media provide the platform for celebrity and consumer culture to meet in ways that maintain societal hegemony. Part of the aesthetic being sold in this regard is the aforementioned perfect body as something that leads to a good life. He further explains that "consumer culture presents the good life as available for purchase" (2010: 200). He also terms this the "Hollywood Ideal", that plays out in mainstream media (2010: 201). Importantly, the explicit and implicit push toward hegemonic femininity and this 'Hollywood Ideal' in the media is not just about the visual aesthetic. It is also about a charismatic confidence and behaviour, or what Featherstone calls "affective force" (2010: 195). He explains this using the example of clothing, noting that it is not just about wearing stylish clothing but also about how one wears it. Celebrities, therefore, serve an important role in this context, based on the way in which they are able to present as "an affective body which is noticed and commands respect; a body which has the power to affect others; which possesses social force in the urban milieu and the spaces of sociability" (Featherstone 2010: 195).

As a result of the significance of their role, it is presented as problematic when celebrities do not align with the hegemonic ideals being promoted. Building on this, Hirdman (2017) notes that content that criticises those celebrities are not read in isolation. Rather, she argues that these texts "enter media flow as rejoinders to preceding glamour images" where audiences are familiar with the overall narrative being disseminated (2017: 370). This narrative emphasises the need for feminine perfection via constant work. Featherstone (2010) ties this in to contemporary consumer culture, noting that the idea sold to the audience is that a

hegemonically acceptable outer appearance leads to inner satisfaction as well. Hirdman (2017) argues that it is at the point where the celebrated and shamed body meet that media content is able to properly resonate in affective ways with the audience in a combination of aspiration and repulsion.

Affectively, content about celebrities in relation to the feminine body also resonates well because of the ways in which the celebrity and the audience member are conflated as one (Hirdman 2017). Looking at it literally, media content speaks to the audience about the celebrity who, for example, has gained weight. But in many ways, the media content is also speaking directly to those women in the audience that have similar bodies or have the potential to gain weight in the future. Hirdman thereby argues that,

> …the affective force in images talking of and displaying corporeal imperfection lies not in the discrepancy between public and private conduct, but in the fleshy contrast between the on-screen and off-screen body (2017: 367).

It is in this regard that this project now turns to mainstream media content from India to consider the ways in which issues of the feminine body emerge in content about Bollywood actresses. Acknowledging the affect in this content is especially fascinating because of the novelty in linking it to the case study of contemporary urban Indian femininity(ies) via Bollywood actresses. All of the existing literature considered thus far in this chapter focuses on Hollywood, the Hollywood Ideal, Hollywood actresses and the western world generally. It, therefore, proves interesting to consider the ways in which these issues manifest in a context outside of the west. Within the chapter, bodily femininity links not just to the physical body of these actresses but also to issues of feminine body image and its connection to fitness, fashion, style and beauty. That is, how the media uses the bodies of these women to frame ideal gender performances. The specific interest here is how, through the privileged bodies of these actresses, a trajectory emerges that couples femininity and the body. These trajectories are directly influenced by the category of a woman's life. That this privilege directly influences the success of the gender performances in question is of little consequence to the ways in which the media encourages emulation of this ideal.

As a result, what this chapter shows is that at times these manifestations may align with existing theoretical work while deviating from them at other times. Both the alignments and

deviations are important because they both properly present a contemporary understanding of urban femininity in an Indian space. Through looking at the detailed understanding of ideal femininity in this space, one is able to get a sense of how contemporary Indian femininity(ies) is understood in relation to broader, more western understandings of femininity which tend to dominate academic discourse. This chapter is further organised according to content about actress who are young women, then actresses who are wives and finally actresses who are mothers. As noted, such a structure enables the chapter to properly demonstrate a holistic, nuanced progression of understanding in the Indian context.

## *5.2 Young women*

What emerges quite strongly from the data about young women is the idea of good and bad in relation to performances of gender linking to the feminine body. Within the data considered, examples of ideal and non-ideal bodies, fashions and style clearly emerge. Here one is able to argue that as per the media, key to the gender performance of young women is a hyper femininity that is firmly located within the status quo. Links can be made here to postfeminism and the ways in which performances of gender and femininity are attributed to not just empowerment and self-pleasure but also to broader understandings of the importance of finding a man and settling down. Despite literal connections to agency and liberation, the affective link to the wider expectations on these women, and young women in general, should not be ignored. In this regard, media narratives regularly echo the importance of this hyper femininity, presenting contextually nuanced and detailed examples of what such gender performances can offer.

### 5.2.1 The feminine body

Looking to the data for clearer understandings of this, an overarching theme that emerges is that of sexiness. Mirroring postfeminist understandings of active and empowered sexiness, the feminine allure of this sexiness is either explicitly noted or features as a common undertone in the data considered. As part of celebrating the hegemonic ideal, the language the media uses often celebrates sexiness. When looking at the body of young women for example, a fit body is presented as an ideal body, and the sexiness that emerges with a fit body is, therefore, emphasised. Thinness and fitness in particular are now firmly located within the understanding of ideal Indian femininity today. Here, the media considered tended to focus on various body parts as an indication of what is “hot” in an actress. Examples include Priyanka Chopra and Deepika Padukone’s legs (Iyengar 2017y & Sudhakaran

2017a), Katrina Kaif's abs (Johar 2017f), Anushka Sharma's "ridiculously hawt back" (Nayak 2017e) and Parineeti Chopra's skin (Nayak 2017e). The focus on the different body parts of different women speaks to a larger lesson that women are often forced to internalise in society today. Hirdman (2017: 368) explains that "women are taught to see – and, one could say, sense – their bodies in parts and to evaluate each part separately". The fragmented ideal that the media seeks and disseminates is, therefore, one that is difficult to achieve. Furthermore, the literal objectification of different women's individual body parts speaks to the hegemonic expectation that ideal femininity is nuanced in the worst ways. Hyper femininity is, therefore, not just a macro issue in relation to overall gender performance, rather it is also a micro issue that manages every aspect of a woman's life and body. Further demonstrating this, when unpacking a photoshoot Alia Bhatt did, *Bollywood Life* (Nayak 2017e) explain that "okay we know Alia's belly looks unrealistically flat but ignoring that bit, I think the shot is just perfect…". This example is especially problematic because despite seemingly noting an error in the re-touching and post production of the picture that evidently makes the picture imperfect, the picture and, therefore, the actress's stomach is described as perfect. In so doing, a thinness that is clearly unrealistic is promoted and favoured.

In this regard, the primary ideal that is disseminated around women's bodies focuses on highlighting thinness and the 'natural' work that goes into maintaining thinness and striving towards it. Interestingly, there are no young women that necessarily counter this expectation, which, therefore, provides no data about the converse. Nonetheless, the affective understanding is that a young woman should never travel that road to begin with. Even if one is not naturally thin, it is something to work towards. It takes work, much like the feminine ideal as per the media and that is welcomed in a postfeminist context (Butler 2013). Thus, as part of maintaining thinness, working out and the results of working out are given a lot of importance in the data collected. These actresses also post about this on their social media. What is made clear is that these workouts are almost always with a personal trainer who provides them with focused attention and expertise on their fitness journey. Very much in line with the expectations of thinness, the actresses regularly highlight the hard work put into maintaining a thin body and thus the importance thereof. For example, in her first post on Instagram for 2017, Alia Bhatt posted a picture of herself with her personal trainer at the gym wishing her fans a "super super super fit 2017" (aliaabhatt 2017). In most cases in the data, through this fitness motivation, thinness is implied and never explicit. While fitness is indeed

an important factor in relation to health and well-being, that the face of this health and well-being is thin is crucial to the ideal disseminated to the audience.

Deepika Padukone is described by *Bollywood Life* as strong, graceful and "very athletic" with a "gorgeous body" (Tripathi 2017c & Iyengar 2017m). Similarly, actress Jaqueline Fernandez stated on *Koffee with Karan* (Johar 2017b) that in her view the actress with the perfect body is Katrina Kaif, someone whose body is also very much aligned with the ideal feminine body. Similarly, when considering the secret to Aditi Rao Hydari's "glow" and "radiance", *Bollywood Life* (IANS 2017a) wonders if this is linked to a regular workout.

However, in addition to the importance of working out as part of maintaining thinness, food also emerges as central to these efforts. Recounting a story from one of her film sets on an episode of *Koffee with Karan* (Johar 2017g), Alia Bhatt noted the way in which they were fed well at one of the locations the film was being shot. She explains,

> …we were eating everything like we were eating so much food. So, like in Jhansi[14] I was feeling like I put on weight so I wanted to eat diet food and there was no diet food on the menu. So, I was crying because I was very hungry (Johar 2017g).

This is an interesting example for a number of reasons. Visually, on the show Bhatt wore a fitted dress that highlighted her thin body, so this alone demonstrates that her concerns around potential weight gain never came to fruition. Additionally, based on her comments, she attempted to counter weight gain through what she terms diet food. The absence of healthier foods left her hungry and frustrated. While hunger is indeed upsetting, she seems to suggest that she was also upset that her efforts to lose the weight she gained were not working despite her trying.

Worth noting here is that the ratio of body size being discussed is less between being thin and being overweight but rather the difference between being thin and apparently very thin. The men in this example (the director and lead actor) preferred a woman who was thin but not too thin, while the woman seems to prefer her body when it was described as too thin. As part of maintaining this, eating an uncontrolled diet is, therefore, problematised. Parineeti Chopra demonstrates this in her Instagram posts on a trip to Dubai, where it appears she was paid to

[14] Location where the next schedule of the film was shot.

promote tourism in the region. Pictures posted from her trip include posts about the indulgent food on offer and the deliciousness of this cuisine. In one post of her eating she asks "Emarati cuisine! Where have you been all my life?!" (parineetichopra 2017). However, included in her posts from this trip is a post of her "power walking" on one of the beaches in the area. She captions the post, "I'd eat my heart out if I had this beach to work it off everyday! Living the dream. Dubai Style" (parineetichopra 2017). Chopra is highlighting to her followers the perils of overindulging in food and the threat it poses to one's body. This then also implicitly points out the pressure of needing to maintain thinness. Similarly, in another example involving Chopra, *Bollywood Life* reports on an incident where the actress seemingly in jest told a friend to "eat less and become thin", which, ironically, she was criticised for (Rajani 2017b). While is it indeed problematic to "fat shame", as *Bollywood Life* puts it, in actuality what is seen as problematic is doing so explicitly. While none of the media considered explicitly criticised people who were not thin, the way in which the importance of thinness is highlighted is firmly located within an affective register.

### 5.2.2 Styled perfection

However, thinness alone is not enough. It is one of the various elements that are presented as key to the idealised hyper femininity that is emphasised. Actresses are also expected to wear their thinness in specific ways at all times. Part of doing this is linked to celebrating and accentuating a woman's thin and sexy body. Priyanka Chopra for example shared posts on her Instagram profile that highlighted her thin yet curvy body (priyankachopra 2017). In the first instance, the picture was the first look of her character in an upcoming film, where she wears a fitted red dress that accentuates the hourglass shape of her body. In the second instance, a few days later, Chopra shared a silhouette picture of herself in a bikini on a beach. Both pictures were also very feminine in the way in which the curves of her body were accentuated, and clearly and intentionally aligns with and demonstrates the idealised feminine body. However, what is also clear via mainstream media is that there is a clear aesthetic that is encouraged which properly encompasses all important facets of the idealised hyper femininity seen today. Crucial to this aesthetic are issues of fashion, style and beauty.

Aware of the expectations around this aesthetic, these actresses regularly share posts on Instagram of their outfits and beauty looks for different days, events and occasions. In addition to these posts showing fans and followers what they are wearing, these posts are also about crediting the necessary fashion designers, stylists, hairstylists and make-up artists.

These actresses, therefore, demonstrate the collective effort it takes to properly meet the expectations around idealised femininity in society today. This also links to the fact that the idealised femininity seen in the media today is the amalgamation of fashion, style, beauty and physical body. The shift in media expectations over the years means that the new ideal is an extremely shiny, polished and glamorous idea. While each of the issues of fashion, style, beauty and physical body are individually important, the way in which they come together is the most important part of promoting a perfect picture of the ideal.

How the actress poses in her Instagram posts is also significant because it becomes clear that the different poses are meant to accentuate different things. Some poses are about showing off the clothes while others are about showing off accessories, hairstyles, make-up, manicures, shoes and so on. Furthermore, in addition to these looks accentuating the body of these actresses, the styling also varies in terms of what else is accentuated. Full and thick hair, big eyes, pouty lips and long legs are all examples of this. So, when Jaqueline Fernandez wanted to promote her sponsorship with a denim clothing company, the picture she posted of herself in denim was taken from a low angle, highlighting her high heels, long legs and curvy but small bum (jacquelinef143 2017). Audiences are able to connect with these ideals through the images on these posts. That these looks are curated by a team of people and often made up of extremely expensive clothing, jewellery and other products is of little consequence. In some cases, the ideal is then also being sold to audiences such that they are made to think that when they purchase the same products these actresses use, they too may achieve a similar type of idealised femininity.

This is further emphasised via the mainstream media, where the need for audiences to also place as much effort into their clothing, hair and makeup is regularly made clear. They suggest that through these efforts, the ideal femininity achieved should be a combination of pretty, chic, well styled, original, sexy, classy and effortless all at the same time. In these instances, the actresses are explicitly presented as role models to the general audience. Talking about Alia Bhatt, *Bollywood Life* (Iyengar 2017n) suggested "Alia is our queen of chic looks. She can give you immense style goals by wearing the simplest outfits". In the same vein, the publication also thanked the actress "for pushing us to try new things with our hair" (Iyengar 2017u). Addressing the audience directly clearly points them towards noting

Bhatt's style, thereby encouraging young women in the audience to actively draw inspiration from Bhatt in their own gender performance.

As part of making the connections between the actresses and the audience clear, some of the actresses are also framed in ways that resonate with the audience's journey. Where audiences are encouraged to mimic the femininity that these actresses promote, the general assumption is that women in the audience are not yet doing this successfully. As such, they need to transform. The transformation is also framed through coverage of certain actresses with specific, positive language used to emphasise the positive importance of such a transformation. For example, Katrina Kaif's perceived transformation is celebrated stating,

> Katrina Kaif's recent fashion outings have been quite hot…We established the fact that her wardrobe went through a major makeover, just as much as her style, almost a year ago…she continues to ace each and every outing with her panache (Iyengar 2017f).

Similarly, in relation to Deepika Padukone, *Bollywood Life* (Rajani 2017a) suggests,

> If you take a look at her appearances from before and compare it to the way she carries herself now, there is a HUGE difference. We aren't saying that she wasn't trendy back then but her fashion sense has evolved all these years. In fact, today, Deepika is one of those actresses whose fashion sense can never go wrong. From her outfits to her makeup to her body language, everything has undergone a massive change.

In both examples, what is especially important to note is that not only is the publication mapping the actress's transformation, but they are also locating this transformation within the affective register. Their transformations were not just about the clothes and makeup they wore but also about how they carry themselves. From Kaif's panache to the difference in how Padukone wears trendy clothes, the publication is alluding not just to the clothes and makeup but also to a confidence. A confidence that comes with transforming one's image in line with existing trends.

These trends are highlighted via favourable coverage of specific beauty, style and fashion outings that these actresses make. For example, when looking at data about makeup and beauty specifically, one is able to observe a broad overview of the primary characteristics that are favoured which link to well put together looks that are made up but not too made up, neat,

trendy, chic, easy and radiant. When an actress's look meets these standards, they are praised in the media. Demonstrating this, Alia Bhatt is described as a "dream" (Bhattacharjee 2017b), while Deepika Padukone is described as "gorgeous" (Nayak 2017a) and "godly" (Iyenagar 2017c), with one article even saying she "is so spectacular, I think she deserves a spot as 8th wonder of the world" (Tripathi 2017b). The praise is unmistakably communicating a clear message to the audience.

Further demonstrating this positivity when analysing Padukone's overall look, *Bollywood Life* writes,

> We were surely not prepared for such a hot look and we are glad that the actress has managed to impress us with this outing. The way the suit accentuates her curvy bod and long legs is something we've been dying to see for quite some time now (Iyenagar 2017d).

An ideal look is, therefore, one that comes together in ways that properly accentuates the body while also having the right amount of sexiness as part of meeting the ideal hyper feminine gender performance. Compromising on this ideal is in itself not ideal.

For example, when Priyanka Chopra made a red-carpet appearance soon after she suffered a concussion while on set, the actress emphasised the importance of wearing high heels. Writing about this, *Bollywood Life* (Shah 2017b) explains,

> The journalist also asked about Priyanka Chopra taking a risk and wearing heels, even though she was just out of the hospital a few days back. Priyanka laughed and replied back, 'How can a girl go to a red carpet without heels? Don't tell my doctor that! He'll give me a call tonight. He shouldn't know. Let's just say I was in sneakers and when he sees the pictures, I'll say 'Oops! I forgot because of the concussion.' I got hurt on my head, so I am supposed to forget things. So I forgot the instructions.'

Despite being advised not to wear high heels, the actress could not bring herself to wear flat shoes on the red carpet. In this instance, she suggests that red carpets are a known place for young women to really embrace their hyper femininity, as such not wearing high heels was not an option. It likely also speaks to an awareness on her part, or the part of her team, of the media scrutiny that comes with the public appearances that these actresses make.

A similar issue emerges with the idea of an 'airport look' in India. Here, actresses are expected to look fashionable and made up as they enter and exit airports, for the brief minutes when they walk between the airport terminal and their waiting car. While airport looks are slightly less intense in relation to heels and other elements of fashion (with sneakers being acceptable), these looks still need to be trendy and fully styled according to the media. Talking about Kriti Sannon and Deepika Padukone's airport look, they write,

> Generally, at the airport, we tend to see celebs channel their real selves as they wear what they consider to be the most casual and comfortable. Here too, as we saw both the divas make the airport a runway from some Fashion Week, we noticed how they both looked chic and gorgeous. These are looks we can definitely give a try to! (Iyengar 2017j).

The link to Fashion Week is particularly telling because despite noting issues of being comfortable and casual at an airport, the publication is thrilled that both Padukone and Sannon chose to be more fashionable. Furthermore, the idea that "we can definitely give a try" to these fashionable airport looks makes it less of an instruction (directed only to the audience) and more of a collective effort, where even the writers seem to want to dress more fashionably at the airport. As reason for dressing fashionably is never really given, one is able to conclude that this links to the expectation that young women need to always perform their hyper femininity in ways that are glossy and polished; showing that they are both effortlessly glamorous but also are about their image.

However, actresses themselves have expressed frustration with these expectations, noting the pressure that is placed on them to always look a certain way. In one instance in the data, Katrina Kaif explains that she finds the expectation quite tedious, observing that these expectations have amplified in recent years. Speaking to *Bollywood Life,* she says,

> This whole trend of dressing up for the red carpet and big events is something that happened in the past few years. Before, when I used to go to a premier of one of my films, I would just pick a dress out of my closet. I think it's with the age of social media and the whole digital thing – Instagram – everybody has started this trend of high-fashion dressing for events. Sometimes it's fun – you get to play dress-up for a night – but the way it was before, when we used to put on anything and it wasn't that important, that was also a nice way to be (DNA 2017c).

While Kaif explains that dressing up can be fun, she demonstrates an awareness of the pressure placed on actresses. With the media being even more ubiquitous as a result of social media, actresses are all the more visible and, therefore, the media tries to use as much of this visibility as possible to disseminate clearer understandings of contemporary hegemonic femininity. That actresses themselves find this oppressive at times speaks to the agency they have in this scenario. In many ways, one could argue that they are forced to perform these hyper femininities very specifically. But as these performances also become increasingly pervasive, others are also noting how contrived it sometimes appears. On an episode of his show, Karan Johar (2017c) talks about this and the Bollywood fashion scene, which he suggests is now beginning to come across as "overdone".

Despite this, Johar himself is guilty of perpetuating these expectations. On various episodes of his show he comments on what the actresses who feature as guests of his show wear, focusing in particular on those outfits that do not meet his expectations. While he says this directly to them, it still works to reinforce the same expectations he suggests are overdone. His expectations directly align with the media expectations noted in the data collected and, therefore, it is important to note the contradiction in his comments about being "overdone". Like the media, Johar expects these women to embrace their sexuality and wear clothing that accentuates their body. Demonstrating this, when Sonam Kapoor and Jaqueline Fernandez appeared on his show in different episodes, he expressed his dissatisfaction at their outfits. During her episode, Kapoor wore a long-sleeved pant suit with voluminous ruffles, a buttoned-up shirt and stiletto heels. Of this outfit, Johar expressed, "I find Sonam quite covered up. I think she should just bare…" (2017c). Through innuendo Johar is commenting on Kapoor's lack of skin as well as her lack of openness in relation to her personal life. Similarly, when Fernandez made her appearance on the show, she wore a high neck red blouse and matching red trousers, also with stilettos. Commenting on her outfit he says, "We see nothing. You're more covered up than you've ever been in your career" (Johar 2017b). He continues "I was expecting you to like be all sexy…" (Johar 2017b). Again, him pointing out a lack of revealing clothing and suggesting that her long-sleeved blouse was not sexy, directly demonstrates the noted contradiction in his statements.

This speaks to a trend in the media to also criticise those looks that do not meet the ideal standard. In one instance, *BollywoodLife* criticised Deepika Padukone's outfit because "the

actress' gown didn't really amp up her hot bod as it fell flat" (Iyengar 2017a). Similarly, when Katrina Kaif wore an outfit that was deemed too covered they said they were taken aback as "it was very unlike the actress, who usually flaunts her hot body"; further adding,

> The diva is capable of doing much better than this. Even though it was a good look, we have set standards for the actress in our head and we think she has great potential. Hopefully, Kat will get the message and try more such bold and risqué looks (Iyengar 2017z).

The media considered is thus very vocal whenever an outfit or an element of an outfit does not meet their standards. Another major issue linked to the repetition of clothes and styles because of its lack of originality. Actresses were criticised for wearing the same colour too often, wearing outfits that were too plain or outfits that were styled badly. Similarly, in relation to beauty and makeup, actresses were criticised for not wearing enough makeup and repeating hairstyles.

Demonstrating this, *Bollywood Life* (Tripathi 2017e) dissects one of Katrina Kaif's looks, saying,

> By now one thing about Kat that I've learnt is the fact that she doesn't keep her makeup game very heavy. It's always subtle and not too much…But here, it looks non-existent. I'm not saying the makeup should've been a lot and glaring but it should've been enough for the ensemble. You see sometimes, the makeup needs to be a little visible so it doesn't look too dull…I must say that sans makeup too, the actress always brings out the radiance in her face. But you'd agree with me on this that right here, a little detailing on the eyes would've been very kickass.

The conversational style of such an excerpt is especially noteworthy in relation to how it minimises the harshness of the criticism aimed both Kaif and women who prefer not wear too much makeup. The style, however, does not alienate the reader who may find this absolute harshness jarring or unkind. Additionally, presenting the critique as advice for "her" own good, whether the her is Kaif or the young woman reading the text, aligns with a postfeminist agenda of agency and empowerment.

A similar approach and style is taken when critiquing Deepika Padukone. Regarding some of her red-carpet appearances, *Bollywood Life* (Iyengar 2017o) suggests,

> Deepika Padukone may have a string of hits in terms of her film career but with respect to fashion, there have been more flops that what red carpet can consume! ...Be it the outfits, or the hair or the makeup, every time she steps out, there's something missing.

The issues here criticise Deepika's outfits for being too simple, too risqué, unflattering and so on. Clearly contradictory in nature, this speaks to the media's unrealistic expectations of the performance of femininity, where women are meant to do everything and nothing at the same time.

Much like the conversational and faux caring style noted with the criticism Kaif saw, the publication often justifies their criticism of Padukone as just wanting the best for her.

*Bollywood Life* (Nayak 2017l), for example, argues,

> Okay, maybe we have too high expectations from Ms Padukone but after all, she's so beautiful that sadly, the outfits aren't doing much justice to Deepika's oh-so-gorgeous face. We miss seeing her being in her own beautiful self. We miss the colours, that pretty smile…

Towards the end of the data collection period it seems the publication's frustration with Padukone grew. As a result, the conversational style and faux care were altered to adopt a slightly more irritable tone, justifying such a tone with an audience poll. Thus, not only is the media considered as acting as an instructor of the people, they also switch to become the voice of the people when it suits them. Demonstrating this, they write,

> It's getting a little tiring to watch Deepika make so many fashion faux pas. While we get it that she's trying a lot of risqué looks, maybe she should tone it down for the time being. Because we need a break from the drab looks…We had earlier done a poll story where we asked you folks to state whether DP needs a change of stylist and majority have gone with changing the stylist. Take a hint, Deepika! (Iyengar 2017w).

In many ways, such frustration on the part of the publication is likely also justified because of the way in which they prefaced earlier criticism with faux care and concern. Additionally, it is also likely that from a media production standpoint they know that they have to write about Padukone as a leading Bollywood actress with huge interest from a demanding audience. Despite this, she was not living up to their expectations and not giving them any content that suited their hegemonic ideals.

Building on this, another key issue that emerged within this theme linked to idealised Indianness. This is especially highlighted when this Indianness is threatened. The boundaries of Indianness in this regard primarily link to the amount of skin the actresses are allowed to show while still remaining *decent*. Thus, while there is such a thing as not sexy enough, there is also such a thing as too sexy. Based on the link to Indianness, too sexy is relatively more conservative compared to the west. The point being made is that these thin and fit bodies are to be celebrated and emphasised, but with clear limits. As a result of the fact that these limits are so regularly and clearly made, there were no specific incidents that occurred in the data collected that crossed these boundaries. Nonetheless, the boundaries are always discussed as part of reminding the audience that they exist.

Noting these boundaries, Sonam Kapoor, for example, explains that while she feels comfortable in her skin, this does not translate to showing off her body in revealing ways. She asserts,

> That's my choice, so even if I wear sheer it needs to be done tastefully. Like I just saw Nicki Minaj and I was like Woah! I think that it's hot but, I would never put that much other in public (Nandrajog 2017b).

In such an instance, where the actress herself articulates this balance, hegemony is maintained in ways that packages it as an act of choice and agency. Additionally, through using an example of American singer Nicki Minaj as someone who went further than an Indian woman was willing to, Kapoor makes reference to the well documented cultural tension between India and the west, where India and Indian femininity emerge as more measured and refined (Reddy 2006). As such, in those instances where the media perceives actresses to be nearing the boundary, they are quick to scandalise the situation and create a hype where there isn't one. This is part of reminding women of these boundaries and the shame that comes with crossing them, but is also based on purely economic reasons, considering that such a scandal will attract a larger audience.

Demonstrating this, Sonam Kapoor wore an outfit at a media event that was deemed too revealing. *Bollywood Life* (Iyengar 2017q) unpacked this saying,

> It was pretty evident that the dress was over the top and brought her criticism because of how revealing it was. We thought the outfit lacked at a lot of places excluding the side b**b. The ruffles didn't work well, the jumpsuit length should've been up to the

> ankle. Of course, she was shamed for the look as internet 'gems' found the outfit way too revealing for a girl and so so…Perhaps it is time to let go off the fashionista tag for Sonam, don't you think?

What is clear here is the desire for the actress to cover up. The conversational "don't you think?" is also guiding the audience to an aligning opinion. Post the event, Kapoor spoke about the incident explaining that her dress moved slightly and photographers maneuvered intentionally to take unflattering pictures of her from unflattering angles. She explained,

> I was wearing the correct innerwear, so nothing bad happened. They made it into such a big deal on social media! I was like, 'God! So what I am wearing is so important!' Of course, what I wear has always been discussed… (Iyengar 2017q).

Thus, while Kapoor rejects the implication that her clothing was too revealing, worth noting is the way in which the media considered use specific methods to include shame when required. While they themselves may not cross certain boundaries (in relation to vulgarity) within this policing of women's bodies, the constant scrutiny of women and their bodies gives rise to a culture that enables this. Audiences note these types of speculation and while many would not replicate the same, some do and feel little about doing it.

An example of this is what actress Disha Patani experienced when she was criticised online for wearing a revealing dress. One way in which this criticism manifested was around plastic surgery. In their article about the incident and how the actress fought back, *Bollywood Life* (Chauhan 2017c) noted a comment an online user made about the actress's dress, when the user said, "U look like a whore exposing your boobs…we got the point u have implants, no need to show off!" While one can assume that media publications would never themselves say things like this based on the legislative boundaries that publishing and broadcasting operates within, what they do say are milder versions of the same. Similarly, including the harsh and negative comments from unnamed internet users is also not unintentional. As Hirdman (2017: 37) explains, all this does is create "a clashing over-emphasis". They are using what random internet users say to make their point for them, which is extremely dangerous considering the power of such a mainstream platform. Nonetheless, the publication also included Patani's response to the users' comment. She retorted,

> It's easier to judge a woman on the basis of how much they cover up their skin, but it's hard to accept your own cheap mentality where you can't stop staring at those inappropriate areas which you are asking her to cover! Wake up and start accepting

> that we are not going to be anybody's idea of an 'Indian girl'. Don't let your frustration destroy somebody's life because you won't be happy if it happens in your own family! Stop this hypocrisy and open your mind! (Chauhan 2017c).

Patani's comment demonstrates her frustration with the culture that has emerged where society places such a major emphasis on femininity, as not only a bodily property but also as a perfect femininity being something one should strive towards. This to such an extent that people feel free to comment on a woman's body whenever they please. While publishing Patani's comment did give her a right of reply, publishing the initial comment also worked to inform public sentiment.

Such scrutiny adds more pressure to the expected ideal. In addition to having to look perfect by wearing perfectly fitting clothing that is just sexy enough, with the right, original and creative hairstyle and the right amount of makeup, they also have to carry it off a certain way and be receptive to constant scrutiny that is presented as a norm in the public eye. What this demonstrates to the audience is not just that contemporary femininity takes a lot of work to find the perfect balance, but also that women need to accept that in society today if they do not meet patriarchal hegemonic standards of hyper femininity they will be reminded of it regularly. The lesson here is one that extends to all phases of a woman's life.

## *5.3 Wife*

Demonstrating this, the discourse around femininity also applies to many of the young actresses in the data who are married and still. However, there is a significance to the institution of marriage in these women's lives as well. Marriage here is something that re-inscribes tradition. This is especially suggested through the discourse (or lack thereof) that emerges within the mainstream media data collected. It is, however, suggested through implication that though being a wife is important, in relation to the broader trajectory at play it is less important than the categories of youth and motherhood. Nonetheless, the relatively lesser amounts of data around these married women in the mainstream media is given nuance via the Instagram posts by these women. Through their Instagram posts, it is made clear that they continue living and as such the posts (with the little mainstream media data) provide insights into the frameworks of femininity in which they locate their gender performance. So, while there are noted discursive continuations in relation to these frameworks, there are also key differences.

### 5.3.1 A more traditional bodily femininity

An important continuation in this regard links to the issue of thinness. Thinness, as the general standard around the ideal femininity, seemingly remains. Sunny Leone, for example, posts pictures of herself working out. While her captions suggest that at times she may feel tired, she nonetheless share posts of her working on toning and running on the treadmill (sunnyleone 2017). The results of these workouts are demonstrated when Leone posts pictures of herself in a bikini while on vacation. These pictures clearly depict her slim body and toned stomach (sunnyleone 2017). Building on this, one actress that especially emphasises the importance of working out in her life via her Instagram posts is Bipasha Basu. Through her posts, it is clear that fitness and working out are very important to her. In one post, early in the new year, Basu shared a message stating "here's to a year of better habits, positive thinking, clean eating and most of all, loving yourself" (bipashabasu 2017). The link between eating and thinness was unpacked in detail in the earlier section, however, Basu adopts a more mature approach in linking this to self-love and care. She regularly builds on this by adding in the element of working out, posting messages like "sweat, smile and repeat" as well as "work out like your life depends on it. Because it does" (bipashabasu 2017). She also shares pictures of herself working out, describing the gym as her "happy place", as well as explaining how energised she feels after a good workout. Through these posts then, Basu presents a healthier lifestyle as an investment in oneself, which indeed it is. However, that this manifests in ways that clearly align with hegemonic ideals around thinness suggests that this message is not simply one of self-love and care.

This is further highlighted in the mainstream media considered via one of the rare examples of an actress that is not thin and toned as per the idealised expectation. Vidya Balan is renowned for her acting abilities and does not fit the mould of a stereotypical Bollywood actress (thin, sultry and extra glamorous). Her talent is, therefore, regularly emphasised, yet discourse around body, style and fashion that follows other actresses struggle to find footing with Balan in the same way. The instances where it does happen are limited and tend to focus on how she falls short in the departments outside of acting. Demonstrating this, in one article *BollywoodLife* (2017d) writes,

> In an industry obsessed with zero size and impeccable dressing, Vidya Balan came up the top of the stardown (sic) solely through her performances, and despite not belonging to any star family. She doesn't even mind taking on roles that goes against

> the homely image she has among her fans, like the role she (sic) in The Dirty Picture that won her a National award. Even after marriage she continues to act in movies that interests her skills.

In a style that mimics a reverse compliment, the quote criticises Balan's style and size. Noting her performance in *The Dirty Picture,* where she played a seductive actress from the past, they contrast this titillating performance to her actual image which they describe as homely. To call someone homely is to call them simple. While this is not an explicitly outward criticism of the actress, compared to the promotion of glamorous performances of femininity seen with other actresses, the contrast is clear. The narrative being disseminated suggests ideal femininity is achieved through work and Balan being described as homely suggests the limits of the work she puts into her gender performance. Here, it would also be remiss not to acknowledge that the shame associated with such gender performances would likely be a lot more explicit if this were a young woman. As a result of Balan being married, beginning to locate her within the home suits the status quo. While ideally the media considered may want a bit more from her femininity, as a wife being homely is fine.

Thus, it is here that one is able to begin mapping a shift to a femininity that though still modern is also more acutely aware of tradition. Balan is implicitly shamed for at times presenting herself outside of her work in ways that are possibly too traditional. Where contemporary Indian femininity is seen as a mixture of modern (western) and traditional (Indian), Balan seemingly does not serve as an example of that hybridity. She appears to reject these pressures and focuses on her work and what works for her. Via her Instagram profile, it is clear that Balan, though stylish in her own way, prefers a more Indian aesthetic, wearing mainly saris and other Indian garments when it comes to her personal style (balanvidya 2017). Though tailored, these outfits are not as fitted as seen with the clothing worn by younger women. While this is likely preferred to a woman being too Western at the expense of her Indianness, the need for a balance of both as a better alternate is implied.

Bipasha Basu seems to strike more of a balance in this regard. Though not discussed in the media data collected, this can be concluded via her Instagram page. This balance is best illustrated via one of Basu's posts that promotes a newly designed shoe that her clothing business is selling. A take on a traditionally Indian shoe called a *kolhapuri,* Basu describes the version they have designed and are selling as "the modern *kolhapuri*" which she says

"gets its name from little updated details like a light and comfy cork wedge, luxe suede finish and that pop hue!" (bipashabasu 2017). In essence, the shoe is still traditionally Indian, but just has certain new and more modern features. These updates amplify the femininity but the shoe is still Indian enough, thereby finding a balance between modern and traditional. This balance in relation to the contemporary femininity of these women, who are wives, is meant to keep its Indian essence while still finding relevance in contemporary spaces. Thus, while Basu does dress in casual (western) clothing in her everyday life, be it a dress on Valentine's day or leggings and a tank top while working out, her professional appearances (where designers, stylists, hairstylists and make-up artists are tagged) are marked by their Indianness. In one instance, she wears a floor length Indian dress-like outfit coupled with a matching *dupatta* (scarf) draped over her right shoulder and arm (bipashabasu 2017). The outfit is low cut at the chest but not in a revealing way, thereby taking the aforementioned issue of how much skin to show into consideration. Similarly, a few weeks later at a charity event, she wore a floor length *lehnga* (Indian skirt) with a matching blouse and *dupatta* (bipashabasu 2017). Though low cut, the blouse was covered by the dupatta that was also draped across her stomach leaving only some of her midsection still visible. It thus appears that in the context of women who are wives, this is the coveted balance that one should strive for, especially if one's body is thin.

However, when these women appear too sexy, this is problematised. For example, be it for film roles or photoshoots, there are instances where Balan adopts a more sexual version of femininity and the media considered use those instances to make an additional point clear. Like with young women, for women who are wives, there is such a thing as too sexy. In one instance where Vidya Balan posed for a revealing photoshoot, the media considered were unimpressed. *Bollywood Life* (Banerjee 2017a) recalled their shock when comparing it to a recent picture from a photoshoot that actress Sunny Leone was a part of. They write,

> Sunny has donned a pair of black shorts with a glittering gold blazer for the shoot. With the camera giving a good view of her ample cleavage, the shot instantly reminds you of the Vidya Balan picture in a blazer a few years ago. The Paa actress had sent shockwaves with the snap. While the shock value is not there in Sunny's case, there is no doubt that she owns the picture with her waves, red lips and mysterious look in the eyes (Banerjee 2017a).

As such, an image that sharply contrasts her existing, more traditional image is presented as shocking. Balan posing for a picture that shows off her cleavage is, therefore, considered too racy.

In similar fashion, an interesting example emerges with actress Sunny Leone. Leone complicates the boundaries that are presented more clearly than in the case of Balan. This is likely because of the fact that Leone had a past acting in pornographic films. Leone is, therefore, credited by some for a "sexual awakening in Bollywood" (Chauhan 2017b). As such, through the data she is described as hot, racy, bold, sizzling, seductive and stylish. *Bollywood Life* (2017c) suggests that what she does best is "look sexy and make her fans go crazy". Focus on Leone in the media considered is centred around her sex appeal. It is in this regard that in the above quote where Leone posing topless (through implied nudity) is mentioned, it is not as shocking as compared to Balan doing it. Importantly, this is likely because Leone is definitely an anomaly in the fact that there hasn't been an actress in Bollywood that starred in explicitly pornographic films prior to being a Bollywood actress. As such, being the anomaly results in additional boundaries of femininity being somewhat ignored to a certain extent within the media as they deal with the intrigue around her image. However, despite this, Leone herself seems to be aware of locating herself within the boundaries of Indian femininity. So, while *Bollywood Life* finds it baffling that "she has also started avoiding onscreen kisses as well, for some reason" (Sudhakaran 2017b), Leone is seemingly aware of the judgment that comes with the mainstream media. While she does not embrace postfeminist understandings of contemporary femininity, she presents an awareness of the limits in the Indian context, both as a woman and as a wife.

However, while she adopts a coyer persona in media interactions, Leone is less inhibited on her Instagram page, which is presumably made up of more than just her Bollywood fans. It is here that one properly sees the complications around the boundaries of Indian femininity(ies). Her posts about her outfits for professional appearance are a lot more revealing than the likes of Balan and Basu, and in many ways aligns with a younger aesthetic (sunnyleone 2017). Furthermore, they are generally more western than Indian. As noted, this is seemingly expected of Leone as an anomaly in the mainstream media. Her body is presented as a lot more public than other actresses. This is most clear with videos Leone posted on her Instagram page, which depicted audience responses to a guest appearance she did in a film.

The guest appearance was in a dance song in the film where Leone featured in a seductive avatar. In the videos Leone posted, audience members in the cinema, seemingly men, were completely enjoying themselves dancing along as this song came on, with some even throwing money at the screen. Leone captioned the first video "Might not mean much to some but means the world to me! Thank you to my fans! Biggest reward you could ever give me is seeing this!! Feel like crying!". followed by "Love it!!" accompanying the second video (sunnyleone 2017). Though ignored by Leone, the sleazy undertones of these fans actions in the cinema are exactly in line with how the mainstream media talk about the anomaly that is Leone. Thus, while she may not be included in general understandings of exemplary femininity based on her anomaly status, through her contrasts between idealised Indian femininity and a femininity seemingly more influenced by western dispositions are made implicitly clear.

More broadly, what the discourse around the bodies of these Bollywood actresses who are wives suggests, is the need for balance. As women step into their roles as wives and then mothers, the tension between western and Indian ideals in relation to femininity grows. Women are, therefore, expected to demonstrate an awareness of this tension, thereby striking a balance through their gender performance.

### *5.4 Mother*

Discourse around women who are mothers starts to properly shift away from what emerges in discourse around young women and women who are wives. While some of the norms around thinness still carry through to this category, the boundaries that were noted in both the previous categories are now drawn even closer, with women who are mothers expected to perform an ideal hyper femininity that is notably more controlled than in the case with younger women. Links can be made here to the need for balance between modern western values and norms and traditional Indian values and norms. Demonstrating this, much of the content considered in relation to these women focuses on two actresses in particular, Kareena Kapoor Khan and Lisa Haydon. During the data collection period, Kapoor Khan had just given birth while Haydon was still pregnant. The focus on these women is tied intrinsically to bearing children and new motherhood. Outside of this, the few instances that focused on actresses who are already mothers primarily highlighted issues of aging.

### 5.4.1 The feminine body

Aging is presented with some level of concern in the media considered, where it is understood as imminent yet unfortunate. Importantly, the intention in the media considered appears to not be about rejecting an aging feminine body but rather about embracing it in the right ways. Furthermore, these women are expected to age in ways that are natural and effortless. This speaks to a pressure that exists for these women to continue to look a certain way. Thus, in the data collected, when praising these women, emphasis is placed on the ways in which they look good for their age. While never explicitly criticising an aging actress, one is reminded of the point Hirdman (2017) makes about the ways in which issues of the corporeal need to be understood affectively. This discourse serves as a piece of a bigger puzzle and so these women are nonetheless aware of these expectations, based on the affective memory of other discourses. This is demonstrated in the way in which Sushmita Sen discusses the pressure to age gracefully. Sen tells *Bollywood Life* (IANS 2017b),

> I think people give too much importance to the age factor. Ageing isn't a new thing and everybody has to go through it at some point of time. I just want to age gracefully and enjoy the process.

What Sen does here is criticise the pressure but also subscribe to it. Her media appearances also speak to this as she is also considered to be aging gracefully as per the media. Interestingly, in another example, *BollywoodLife* (Nayak 2017k) talks about Malaika Arora Khan. They say,

> …trust me this woman knows how to wake up sexy and keep it going until the end of the day…And goddamn she is 43!!!...Indeed, Malaika seems to (sic) rapidly aging backwards with not just her style game on point but also her sex appeal multiplying with every passing day.

Here, one can note the pleasant surprise that, despite being 43 years old, Arora Khan still performs her femininity in ways that are pleasing to the media. Particularly interesting in this example is the mention of her sex appeal. Much like the balance of traditional and modern as seen with actresses who are wives like Bipasha Basu, Arora Khan also attempts to strike this balance. In one of her Instagram posts from a red-carpet appearance she did, the actress shares her look, where she wore a low-cut dress with cut-outs at her waist (malaikaarorakhanofficial 2017). Despite this, the length of her dress was over the knee and she seemingly appeared to strike the right balance of sexy but not too sexy. Much like the

previous two categories, the overarching expectation of contemporary femininity is that of sexiness. However, as with both the young woman and wife category, there is such a thing as too sexy. Here, it is also worth noting that in relation to sexiness, particularly linking to women who are mothers, there are exceptions that may exist based on the public nature of these women's lives as glamorous actresses. It is, therefore, unlikely that the media assumes that everyday mothers would mimic the exact dress Arora Khan wore in the aforementioned Instagram post, but rather that the essence of that sex appeal would translate. The boundaries of this sex appeal are reiterated through reminders of age and motherhood. As such, more direct attention is primarily given to those instances where the boundary of too sexy is crossed, as the discursive lesson is easier to follow in that regard.

However, what is constant is the issue of thinness. Sex appeal in a mainstream postfeminist context is largely assumed to be directly linked to thinness. It is as a result of this that thinness is presented as an extremely important component of contemporary femininity. Much of the coverage within this category focused on the ways in which new mother Kareena Kapoor Khan was exercising to regain a slim, toned body and lose her pregnancy weight. According to the media considered, urgency in this regard emerged based on the fact that she had signed a film that began shooting soon after her maternity break ended. Furthermore, in line with the mainstream media trope of the need for celebrity women to regain their thin bodies after giving birth, one is able to note how through Kapoor Khan similar discourse emerges to present an example of the same to audiences. *Bollywood Life* (Iyengar 2017e) demonstrates this in noting, "Basically, Kareena has sworn to break all kinds of norms and stereotypes that actress during maternity and post-maternity need to get back in shape to make an appearance". This style of reverse compliments is clearly one that the publication embraces because as with Vidya Balan, Kapoor Khan is also shamed under the guise of a compliment. While appearing to celebrate the fact that the actress continues to live her life just after having a baby, the implicit tone suggests a disappointment that she did not immediately go into hiding while exercising aggressively to make a dramatic re-debut only when she was thin again.

The media considered nonetheless use the opportunity to highlight the ways in which the actress is working at losing the pregnancy weight, thereby reminding audiences of the work required to see desired results. In an article published just over one month after the actress

gave birth, *Bollywood Life* writes that she "has already lost quite a lot of pregnancy fat and will soon be resuming shoot for Veere Di Wedding" (Iyengar 2017e). Mapping the progress she makes in this way highlights the importance and mounting pressure placed on women to strive for and work towards thinness. As a result, they explain, "…the actress is sweating it out so much to lose her pregnancy weight ASAP…Revealed a source 'Kareena is doing almost everything possible to lose that extra weight.'" (Nayak 2017p). The use of an unnamed source, supposedly close to the actress, demonstrates the urgency of needing to lose the weight gained, emphasising the importance of being thin. Framing the actress's desire to lose weight as desperation to become thin further highlights the urgent tone. They, therefore, also celebrate the actress's hard work anytime that it appears that she is seeing results. For example, while suggesting that they are starting to like her again as she loses weight, providing positive affirmation the publication writes, "the yummy mummy seems to have worked out really hard to shed her maternity weight and boy, are we falling for her all over again? No literally!" (Nayak 2017i). Focusing on the positivity of her transformed, reacquired thin body does not just emphasise the importance of hard work and the positive acceptance of a transformed body, it also makes it extremely clear that there is a desired thinness that needs to be met and maintained, and this should not be forgotten.

### 5.4.2 Embracing motherhood

What is especially novel about the data collected about these actresses who are new mothers is the idea of actresses still leading their public lives while pregnant, which is relatively new in Bollywood. This emerged as a new area for the Indian media considered to be able to disseminate understandings of femininity. Focus in this context was placed on the ways in which these women embraced their pregnancy and, therefore, their role as a mother, naturalising the importance of women having children. Demonstrating the exemplary nature of these performances of femininity, *Bollywood Life* (Bhattacharjee 2017c) describes Kareena Kapoor Khan as one of the:

> most talked about actress in present times despite not being a part of any movie for many months now. The way she has conducted herself throughout her pregnancy is the stuff that examples are made of. And while Taimur Ali Khan[15] is keeping her busy, the actress is also gearing up to get back in front of the big screen.

[15] The actress's child

Highlighting that her conduct is exemplary is the publications way of directly pointing the audience towards this example as the correct way to engage femininity when pregnant. As part of this exemplary performance of femininity, focus is placed on the way in which Kapoor Khan embraced her pregnancy unashamedly. Highlighting this, during an appearance on *Koffee with Karan* (Johar 2017c), the host says to Kapoor Khan,

> It's amazing because you made the baby bump so *frikken* fashionable. Like it's all over the place, you have a wardrobe, you have an airport look, you have completely a designed demeanour of being a pregnant woman in the fashion business, in the show business…

Such a comment not only demonstrates the nature of the actress's gender performance while pregnant, it also presents the detailed nature of the lesson that she serves. While pregnant, she continued to embrace the hyper femininity expected of the contemporary woman, thereby extending the ideal.

As an exemplar, Kapoor Khan is given further hegemonic nuance in a postfeminist context, where she links the choices behind such a performance to issues of agency and empowerment. When asked about the intention behind performing her pregnant femininity in these ways, Kapoor Khan explained on *Koffee with Karan* (Johar 2017c) that "I think I'm just doing exactly what I want and that in itself is making a point. I don't have to try to make a point". Here, the actress claims a casual unawareness of her positionality and the impact of her choices on broader discourses around the femininity of pregnant women, merely intending to enact her femininity as per her agency and will. This then merges into postfeminist discourse that encourages such performances of gender and femininity through emphasising issues of empowering agency.

However, such acts of Indian femininity are still located within the aforementioned spectrum of modern and traditional. The act of a woman flaunting her baby bump became an issue in the example of Lisa Haydon, who posted pictures of herself on Instagram in a bikini while pregnant. While Kapoor Khan flaunting her baby bump appeared to allude to her embracing her pregnancy with pride; with Haydon, one is able to note undertones of excess (skin) when they describe how she flaunts her baby bump. Demonstrating this, *Bollywood Life* (Iyengar 2017b) writes, "Lisa Haydon just posted a pic in a bikini where she is flaunting her baby bump, confirming her pregnancy!" Special attention needs to be paid to the term flaunting.

As innocuous as it appears in this instant, in another article from the same day, the publication writes, "Now although we agree it's really bold of Lisa to come out in the open and share the good news by flaunting her baby bump…" (Nayak 2017f). As Hirdman (2017) notes, these discourses are rejoinders to existing discourses. So, in isolation, the first example of Hayden flaunting her baby bump may not be problematic but when it comes together with other discourse on the topic, a clearer picture begins to emerge. This is reiterated through the word bold. Throughout the data collected, the word bold seems to connote risqué in a way that the media itself is not able to explicitly point out. It implies a discomfort with what they are describing but they are hesitant to come across as prudish or policing. In this example, it suggests that Lisa is pushing the boundary of what is acceptable as a pregnant woman. While none of this is described explicitly, the word choice suggests that the actress deviated from the expected norms of gender performance in this regard and the publication informs the audience of this accordingly. Further highlighting this deviation, *Bollywood Life* (Rajani 2017f) writes,

> Although Lisa hasn't really been making stylish appearances every other day like Kareena Kapoor Khan, who took the internet to storm with her pregnancy, just by the way, Lisa is redefining sexy in her own way…

In trying to be accepting of Haydon's performance of her pregnant femininity, they nonetheless suggest that it is a breakaway from the norm. This breakaway is not further contextualised in order for audiences to understand this new version. Rather, the discourse simply highlights this deviance, reiterating and maintaining a norm. In noting the progression of femininity between the three categories, it is worth pointing out that a young woman in a bikini is not going to be considered a deviance in comparison to a pregnant actress in a bikini. This highlights the shift in the boundary as a woman moves from her youth into the domestic setting of marriage and motherhood. Therefore, to link back to the sexiness that was celebrated with Malaika Arora Khan earlier in this section, one is able to conclude that this is not the same type of sexiness expected of younger women. Rather, the discourse suggests that as mothers this sexiness needs to be in line with these women's age and their roles as mothers and, therefore, adapted accordingly. The constant reminder of their age, even when complimenting them, demonstrates that. Their fashion and style should be maintained in ways that still accentuate their bodies, but this should happen appropriately.

Using Kapoor Khan as an example, the publication appeared to be concerned that the actress would lose her stylishness after giving birth, suggesting that motherhood is not naturally synonymous with style and beauty. While the actress did maintain her glamor, had she not met the standards of femininity she would have been chastised for the same in ways that probably suggest she is not up to the demands of motherhood. This links to Featherstone's (2010) argument that through the media, audiences are encouraged to make conclusions about a person's inner being based on how they present outwardly. *BollywoodLife* (Bhattacharjee 2017a) thus positively covered Kapoor Khan's post pregnancy style, writing in one instance "fortunately for us, Kareena is continuing with this trend even after giving birth to Taimur".

Through various outings, the actress was praised for her "swoon worthy" fashion that was not "too flashy but superbly chic and classy" (Iyengar 2017e). They further argue, "if there is one woman on this planet who can never put you off with her sense of style it has gotta be Kareena Kapoor Khan" (Rajani 2017d). Interestingly, however, the actress's fashion choices are described as fashionable but comfortable. *Bollywood Life* (Iyengar 2017e) writes,

> We are for one loving Bebo's[16] outings as they look chic as well as comfortable. The minute you see the 36 year old diva post for shutterbugs, the first thing that comes in one's head is, man that outfit looks super comfy.

This is particularly noteworthy because of the ways in which these celebrations of her style move away from the idea of sexiness in the absence of an ideal body. As she had still not lost the weight she gained during her pregnancy, the use of comfortable as an adjective suggests that sexiness is not applicable to women who are not thin. Out of this emerges a pregnancy sexiness spectrum of sorts that audiences can be guided by in their own lives. On one side stands a pregnant woman (Lisa Haydon) who was "bold" and too sexy when she was pregnant, and on the other a woman who had not yet lost the weight she gained during her pregnancy. The middle ground is where the ideally thin and appropriately sexy mother is found.

[16] The actress's nickname

## *5.5 Conclusion*

In conclusion, it is clear in this chapter that there are numerous complexities when considering the way in which mainstream Indian media dissects, discusses and disseminates ideals and understandings of contemporary femininity in relation to the feminine body in the Indian context. Bollywood actresses clearly serve as a vessel on which mainstream societal ideological norms play out. Through their gender work of actively maintaining a thin body, selecting stylish designer clothing, getting their hair and makeup done, and presenting this performance to the world, these women are packaged as a message. This message, that is specifically emphasised to audiences, is that achieving ideal femininity takes work and women should want to do that work in order to achieve that ideal. Moreover, this ideal femininity is best understood as a hyper femininity that emphasises the shape of a woman's body, her glamorous and glossy fashion, hairstyles and makeup, that all come together to perform a very specific sexiness in contemporary society. Despite the actresses using teams of people and a lot of money to look and dress the way they do, the mainstream media still encourage the emulation of these gender performances as part of the feminine ideal for ordinary women.

Additionally, based on the nuances of the Indian context, these women are also expected to be acutely aware of their Indianness within this gender performance. This becomes particularly clear as a woman moves from her youth to being a wife and then eventually a mother as per the traditional gendered trajectory. While all women are expected to be aware of and retain their Indianness, younger women are given the most freedom to also engage with both Indian and Western cultural components when performing their femininity. As these women marry this freedom decreases because women are slowly relocating themselves within the domestic space, which is synonymous with a more traditional understanding of femininity. By the time these women have children, they are even further down the spectrum and more aware of Indian tradition. Despite this, issues of glamor, sexiness and aesthetic are never forgotten. While one may argue that much of this analysis already exists academically, a lot of the work that links celebrity and femininity in this way is either dated or western centric. The novelty of this chapter, therefore, lies in the ways in which contemporary bodily constructions and performances of femininity are presented in a space outside of the west. Furthermore, the boundaries of sexiness are especially different in an Indian context as compared to a western context. As such, this chapter presents a clearer picture of how these

contemporary femininities emerge and are extended via the mainstream media and social media.

# Chapter 6: Femininity and Love

## *6.1 Femininity and Love*

Love is an affective experience. Bhana (2013: 03) explains that love "connects people in the emotional act of intimacy…". Building on this, Kroeker and Schaubroek (2013) describe love as an emotional investment of sorts that is based on a personal connection between the lover and the loved. Through this connection and investment, they note that people are able to identify with and feel for their loved ones and become involved in their lives. However, because love is deeply personal, it can also be quite subjective in how it is expressed and measured. Bhana (2013) describes love as a discursive construct that is influenced by a variety of factors (social, cultural, economic and so on). Adding to this, Tukachinsky (2008) draws links here to the mainstream media and the role that it plays in how love is understood and performed. She explains that,

> To a large extent, the construction of any particular form of love is the result of a given society's political and cultural structure…that like any other ideological domain was appropriated by different powerful social players (2008: 181).

The media, therefore, play an active role in this process based on the ideological power they hold. In unpacking this role of the mainstream media in this process of meaning making, one can further reflect on the ways in which celebrity culture also emerges as a major player worth consideration. This is especially so because of the role celebrities play in helping audience members make sense of and navigate contemporary life. The mainstream media often disseminate narratives about love to audiences in ways that are framed via the lives of celebrities. Within studies of celebrity culture, it is widely understood that celebrities are commoditised for this purpose. Egan (2005: 90) notes that through this commodification and subsequent exchange between media producers and the audience, "culture inscribes meaning onto commodities and thus infuses economic transactions with moral and cultural estimations which in turn affects which objects fall into acceptable sites of economic exchange". It is, therefore, within these mainstream spaces that concepts like love properly find their meaning in relation to their idealised versions that aligns with societal hegemony. This is especially important considering that societal hegemony tends to align with sexist and classist understandings of society today. Love is, therefore, more political than initially appears. Tukachinsky (2008: 182) explains that,

> …from a critical perspective, love is one of the oppressive apparatuses employed by those possessing various forms of capital (e.g. the upper classes, men) in order to maintain their elite status (over the lower classes, women, etc.) and impeding social change.

Critically engaging love beyond its everydayness is, therefore, important. This is especially because of the pervasiveness of love. Here, Bhana (2013: 30) notes that love can manifest in a variety of ways including "between family members, friends, or towards significant objects or pets". However, much of the focus on love is around love in relation to romance. Romantic love goes beyond the affective intimacy of general love, with the added dimension of passion (Rule-Groenewald 2013). Tukachinsky (2008: 182) again brings in a link to the mainstream media here, noting that,

> Romantic images of love are prompted by a variety of media texts; romantic novels, Hollywood films, advertisements, and so forth. These texts construct love as an external power, utilizing myths such as 'love at first sight' that is destined to 'conquer all obstacles'…

Importantly, because of its intimacy and affective impact, specific importance is given to romantic love as a result of the potential it has in relation to the patriarchal status quo. This is due to the fact that romantic love emerges as an additional vehicle on which people are able to engage issues of gender and gender performance (Bhana 2013). Therefore, discursive constructions of romantic love in the mainstream media highlight the importance of this love in the lives of heterosexual women and men. Through the circulation of these specific representations of romantic love, people are encouraged to fashion their own gender performance in ways that align accordingly as part of maintaining a broader status quo while they seek and maintain their own romantic love (Tukachinsky 2008). As such, one realises that "…love is gendered" (Bhana 2013: 06). Through the meanings given to love, gender norms and ideals are disseminated that maintain hegemonic, heteronormative and patriarchal understandings of gender.

Looking at this in more detail, Wood (2001) observes that in a western context, widely spread narratives around romantic love emphasise the importance of a woman having a man in her life. This romantic connection with a man is presented as a defining factor of a woman's

worth. However, despite this, Singh (2013) argues that mainstream understandings of love naturally subordinate women at the expense of men. The role of traditional understandings of feminine and masculine are particularly important in this process, as these notions directly shape the power dynamics in a relationship (Casad et al. 2015). Gregoratto (2017) argues that established gender norms and expected gender performance dictate the differences in the ways women and men engage, experience and feel love. Pennington (2009: 34) further suggests that in a patriarchal context, "it is presumed that individuals in interpersonal relationships do not - even cannot - share equality: one partner will have more power specifically, more power *over* the other". Naturally this imbalance of power favours the man. Romantically, this power translates to control in a relationship where,

> the male partner (i.e. larger, stronger, protector, etc.) will enjoy the privileged and more powerful status position within a relationship than the female partner (i.e., smaller, weaker, dependent, etc.). He is presumed to initiate with the woman (romantically as well as sexually), make decisions on behalf of both partners, and generally exercise greater power of will and body within the relationship (Pennington 2009: 34).

Walzer (2008: 06) notes that "while interaction creates gender, gender also structures interaction because societal members recognise that their actions may be evaluated for their gender-appropriateness". In this regard, based on the gendered nature of romantic love, there are clearly established roles that both women and men are required to subscribe to. Gregoratto (2017) adds to this, arguing that the way in which people engage issues of love is structured in line with the status quo. Women are required to give a lot of themselves, both physically and emotionally, in the name of supporting their men, while the same is not expected from their men. The responsibility of maintaining romantic love is, therefore, placed almost exclusively on the woman. Men are encouraged to expect love, while women are encouraged to earn and keep love (2017). Walzer (2008) further explains that when these gender potentials are not fully recognised, the inherence of the patriarchal status quo forces people to recognise this. Demonstrating this, Gregoratto (2017) explains that when a woman for example does not give of herself fully and truly to the emotional labour of romantic love it becomes a problem. She suggests that in these instances, a woman's love "would be considered impure and insincere if associated with self-interest and personal well-being (including economic independence)" (2017: 329).

In this regard, Gregoratto (2017) notes that women are made to realise that the success of the romantic loving equation depends on the work they do as part of investing in that equation. Furthermore, they are forced to also accept that this work and investment needs to be selfless, such that none of this emotional labour is expected from the man. As part of normalising the selfless work expected of women in relation to romantic love, mainstream narratives regularly suggest that love is more important to women than it is to men (Singh 2013). This is likely linked to the need for women to subscribe to these narratives so as to maintain the patriarchal status quo that favours men. The inherence of patriarchy in relation to this emerges as a problem with various layers working together to maintain the overall strength that subordinates women. Thus, women giving importance to love in this way further naturalises this status quo over time. The role of the media in facilitating this process of naturalising gendered romantic love is clear. Tukachinsky (2008) explains that mainstream media content, both fictional and non-fictional, resonate with the audience primarily because of the way in which they exist in realistic and easily identifiable contexts. Additionally, this content is also so widely circulated that it ends up normalised in many mainstream contexts.

Common tropes in this regard include the ways in which a more gender conscious, feminist life is presented as a life that stands in direct contrast to a happy life filled with romantic love (Arvanitaki 2017). Arvanitaki (2017) explains that as women recognise their emotions and feelings in the context of romantic love, a trade-off emerges. This trade-off justifies a shift towards a more patriarchal gender performance based on the importance of finding meaning in love. Through this shift, women are encouraged to actively accept the power inequalities in the equation as a means of accepting and appreciating romantic love. Arvanitaki suggests that within mainstream media narratives of romantic love,

> romances become vehicles for the expression of a message to women readers: individualism, the rejection of traditional social norms or expectations and personal agency may initially set one free but this will oppress them through confinement to a solitary life (2017: 08).

Both Arvanitaki and Johnson (2010) draw links to postfeminist issues of agency in relation to this, where the agency behind gender performance is emphasised when rationalising more patriarchal manifestations of gender performance.

Capitalism adds further dimensions to these understandings of romantic love where expensive clothes, shoes, cosmetics and treatments are also emphasised as essential when seeking and keeping true romantic love (Johnson 2010). Thus, despite considering issues of contemporary empowerment,

> love has transformative power; with the realization of the heroines' love for the heroes and feminism is substituted with a life that better conforms to the patriarchy. To win the heroes' heart the heroines gradually take an asymmetrical role in the relationship (which at times is presented as their neoliberal choice) and withdraw from their neoliberal identities (Arvanitaki 2017: 08).

Tukachinsky (2008: 182) argues that romantic love in this context is closely tied to issues of "social mobility and self-realization", where the mainstream media emphasises "the emotional, hedonistic, and erotic aspects of heterosexual love, at the expense of rational and pragmatic considerations…". As a result, Johnson (2010: 57) argues that in the context of romantic love, mainstream media narratives focus on "influencing girls and women to seek limited form of agency through commodified beauty rather than communal, political change that challenges power balances…". The reasoning behind the promotion of this links to men, in that, even under the guise of agency in a patriarchal context, such a commodified femininity still gives utmost importance to the approval of men.

Wood (2001) explains that placing men as central to the lives of women enables the violent toxic masculinity that is witnessed in society today. In this context, despite being the victim of violence associated with this type of masculinity, women are regularly encouraged to accept and forgive these actions. It is because of this that one argues that gendered romantic love works to render women as vulnerable due to men being afforded more power (Singh 2013). Bhana (2013) argues that these power dynamics intentionally locate women in a role of subservience, where men and their needs are depicted as most important. Gregoratto (2017), therefore, explains that this imbalance which favours men leaves women dependent on them, despite the support that they give men. The emotional labour expected of women props up and supports men. However, because little of the same support is given to women in return, they are not empowered and supported by love in the same way. Men are able to experience tangible difference in their lives based on the existence of a women's love, while in comparison, women are meant to simply find happiness in the act of providing love (2017).

Walzer (2008: 08) builds on this, noting a historical justification for such an imbalance, explaining that,

> the notion that action is 'male' and emotional expression is 'female' has shaped dominant perceptions of love since the 19th century…Men's instrumental acts are not constructed as love, while women are perceived as responsible for love – in expressive, unpaid ways not construed as work.

Randles (2016) thus considers the economic implications of gendered romantic love, noting that while women who have studied and who earn well may gain slightly more power in the romantic context, the patriarchal status quo remains. Women who earn money through their own careers are, however, able to afford additional luxuries that assist them with the domestic labour they are expected to do in addition to their careers. Walzer (2008) further notes that even in cases where women work and earn an income, the status afforded to their income versus the income of the man is not the same. Gregoratto (2017) builds on this by noting that, even if a woman and a man earn equally, the disparity emerges in relation to emotional work, where the woman is expected to give more while the man is able to take more.

Another way in which this kind of blatant sexism is naturalised is through institutions like marriage. Randles (2016: 244) engages the work of Berk in arguing that, as a:

> primary 'gender factory' that creates and reproduces gender ideologies - taken-for-granted ideas about how people should think, feel, and act based on gender differences…heterosexual marriage has long shaped interaction between women and men who act out gendered identities as wives and husbands, especially in the division of family labor.

As such, people regularly note the pressure to marry and settle down as part of proper gender performances in society today. This pressure is justified via heteronormative ideas of evolution (Singh 2013). Through romantic love, a woman and a man are meant to come together on a long-term basis and eventually marry and have children. Singh argues that "romantic love is expected to have preceded marriage…" (2013: 22). Love in this regard is meant to be the solid foundation required for a stable marriage to blossom. Building on this, Rule-Groenwald (2013) explains that the manifestation of romantic love is, therefore, one

centred around commitment. This commitment is expected to lead to marriage. As Watson and Stelle (2011: 264) note, "dating is often assumed to be a precursor to marriage and not a goal in and of itself". Despite this, the process of dating is given importance in relation to how the individuals build their love and set the foundation for their marriage. This is important because mainstream representations suggest that a happy marriage is one built on love (Singh 2013).

Love and marriage are, therefore, often intrinsically linked in order to remind women in particular that seeking love is linked to seeking marriage. Casad et al. (2015: 119) note that for many, marriage emerges as a "rite of passage often associated with unrealistic expectations and fairy-tale fantasies". Ahmed (2017) links this to the affective ways in which life in general is gendered. She explains that in a patriarchal context, the expected trajectory of a woman's life is predetermined to include marriage and reproduction. However, the ways in which these narratives are disseminated and romanticised in the mainstream media leaves little room for one to consider it anything but natural.

Marriage, therefore, emerges as a means through which patriarchy is re-inscribed and legitimised in a woman's life. This is because, as Casad et al. (2015: 119) explain, marriage is something that "forces a person to re-evaluate his or her identity and often reconstruct his or her self-concept". Soulsby and Bennett (2017) build on this, arguing that part of this identity work includes factoring in room in one's life for a new partner. However, because of the patriarchal nature of all this, much of this identity work is expected of women primarily. This is because, marriage has also been intrinsically linked to the maintenance of gender inequalities in society (Singh: 2013). Singh (2013: 23) further explains, "…marriage is a patriarchal institution which clearly defines roles for men (as heads of the family and with unquestioned authority) and women (with subservient obedience to male authority)". Randles (2016) adds to this in noting that heterosexual marriages end up working as a large-scale producer and maintainer of patriarchal notions of gender, where the ways in which women and men perform their gender when married are dictated and legitimised by societal norms and expectations. Walzer (2008) builds on this in noting that the gender inequalities that form the basis of heterosexual marriage are further maintained through the division of work between wife and husband in the household, and eventually between mother and father. Based on the patriarchal nature of all this, Randles (2016) highlights that men have the most

to gain from marriage (and by default romantic love as well). This is further normalised through broader understandings of marriage, where Waltzer (2008: 05) explains that "differentiation between men and women is structured into marriage as an institution…".

As a result, the constant and extensive ways in which these gender inequalities are emphasised and maintained make it difficult to not assume this as the norm. Women are forced to cope in an environment that regularly disenfranchises them. Casad et al. (2015) articulate this coping in relation to an endorsement of what they term benevolent sexism. They suggest that women are forced to support notions of benevolent sexism as part of making sense of the inequalities they face and accept. They define benevolent sexism as an approach that attempts to make sense of a patriarchal society that accepts and justifies the blatant sexism that one witnesses (2015). Within this approach is the idea that "that women should be protected and put on a pedestal by men…", in line with fantasy-based tropes that romanticise the idea of a woman as a damsel in distress that needs to be saved by her man (2015: 121). By engaging gender inequalities in this way, women who subscribe to benevolent sexism are able to justify that sexism as a means for them to be treated with care and respect. Further, these women accept the man in her life as the person that protects and provides for her without question, thereby legitimising the inherent patriarchal status quo.

This chapter then works to consider the ways in which issues of romantic love emerge in a contemporary Indian context via mainstream media content about Bollywood actresses. As with the previous analytical chapters, this chapter is also broken down into data about actresses who are young women, actresses who are wives, as well as actresses who are mothers in order to understand these issues on both a micro and macro level. This is especially important because little work exists in relation to romantic love in a contemporary, urban Indian context and, therefore, this chapter presents detail in relation to how mainstream media content from this space engages theoretical considerations about love. Beyond just aligning or diverging from these theoretical discussions, this chapter also offers empirical nuance to the Indian context. This is especially important because knowledge of issues of love in India in the mainstream media tend to be reduced to limited perspectives, generalisations and stereotypes.

## *6.2 Young women*

Within the data about romance in relation to young women, the trajectory of a woman's life is clearly acknowledged. Not only does this data explain the nature of romance for young women, it also sets the tone for women who are wives, as well as women who are mothers. It is, therefore, not surprising that data about young women was the most detailed of all three categories. The lessons within this phase are expected to carry foundational value through to all phases of a woman's life. A key lesson in this regard links to the importance of romance in a woman's life.

### 6.2.1 Romantic love

Romance is actually presented as crucial to the lives of women and the data regularly reflects that. Before looking at how this manifests in mainstream media content, it is useful to look at how this emerges (though briefly) in what Bollywood actresses post on their Instagram about love as part of understanding how audiences engage the topic through their perceived direct connection with these celebrity women. This emerged in just two instances, likely because of the way in which these women are guarded about their personal lives. In both instances, the posts were less about revealing who their love is for and more about engaging the topic. Through these engagements, love and romance are presented as key factors that lead to fulfilment and happiness.

For example, Disha Patani posted a picture on her Instagram account to mark Valentine's day. In the picture, her hair is dyed crimson red and she smiles somewhat coyly as she holds a red rose. The significance of red and its link to romance and love is clearly intentional. Through the caption she asks fans how they plan to celebrate the occasion, thereby encouraging them to "make someone happy this year…" (dishapatani 2017). This suggests that by celebrating Valentine's day and doing something love-related for someone, that will make them happy. Similarly, in her post to mark the occasion Priyanka Chopra captions a picture of a red rose on her Instagram with "#loveisallthereis" (priyankachopra 2017). While the hashtag itself was not specifically gendered, the significance of the rose as something traditionally gifted to women by men on the occasion, suggests that it speaks to the importance of love in her life. This, in turn, translates into love having similar importance in the lives of women who engage this content.

Adding to this understanding of love, Chopra also posted a picture a few weeks later with the quote, "love doesn't need to be perfect, love is to be true" (priyankachopra 2017). The quote is accompanied with an illustration of a blind man and a disabled woman who has only one leg. The illustration depicts the man carrying the woman on his back, such that he gives her mobility and she gives him sight as she guides him. The image and its accompanying quote emphasises the mainstream narrative that love completes two people in ways that they gain strength from each other. However, metaphorically one is able to also draw from the gendered nature of the illustration, which highlights the strength of the man such that he is able to carry the woman. The action of granting her mobility is also significant in the ways in which patriarchy ultimately decides the trajectory and direction of a woman's life. While the woman in the illustration does add her sight to the union, the distinction between soft and hard power is noticeable. Problematising the illustration in this way is not problematising the coming together of two people, but rather the coming together of two people in gendered ways. These gendered ways discard the independence that both people had despite their challenges and instead of depicting their union as them walking side by side, mainstream understandings of gender weaves its way into the narrative.

Both these instances very much align with mainstream understandings and engagements of love. In conversation with *Bollywood Life* (Nayak 2017s), actress Deepika Padukone, for example, explains the importance of romance in her life when, she says that romance

> definitely features on the list of things that I need that are very important part of my life…To be in a peaceful relationship, it requires two people to be extremely secure about themselves and be extremely secure about the relationship itself. I think it also comes down to understanding each other's professions. If some people may not completely understand the time demands or the travel demands and things like that…I think it's important. You can't choose that but one can be in a positive space if both partners are understanding of the other person's demands.

She articulates romance as a coming together of two people, highlighting the importance of that connection in her life. However, it is important to remember that romantic love is different for men and women. Within theoretical considerations around romantic love, as a result of its gendered nature, men are given huge importance in the lives of women (Wood 2001). Furthermore, women are meant to willingly accept this importance as normal. These

dynamics are, therefore, central to how romantic love is discussed in mainstream media content.

Demonstrating this, during a segment on *Koffee with Karan* (Johar 2017g) where the host asks random, candid questions just to see how the celebrity guests think, Alia Bhatt was asked to choose between not having men and not having girlfriends in her future. Without hesitation Bhatt chose a future without friendship rather than a future without romance. As casual as such a response is, its clear alignment with hegemonic thought highlights the importance of men in the lives of women. Similarly, during her appearance on *Koffee with Karan* (Johar 2017d) Priyanka Chopra also noted the inherence of romantic interaction between men and women. In response to a question about how she deals with all the attention she gets from men, the actress explains,

> There's nothing wrong with attention. You get the attention, you acknowledge it and if you're interested of course you go ahead with it, if you're not interested then it's just what happens to girls.

While noting a level of agency in relation the choice women have to acknowledge the interest men, this agency does not extend to acknowledging the importance of romantic relations between men and women. In arguing that men showing interest in girls is just what happens, is to suggest to audiences that this is the norm in terms of how men and women relate to each other. What is also normalised in this instance is the power that men have in romantic contexts. It suggests that attention is the mans to give and women need to simply accept that. While they may have some choice in terms of how they act on it, it is going to happen no matter what. Romance and all the power and gender dynamics that come with it, is, therefore, seen as natural and women are encouraged to realise this. As a result, large amounts of speculation and discussion are presented to audiences about the love lives of young women. These women are expected to date in full view of the media so that they are able to package romance to the audience.

However, actresses are not always open about their personal lives. Priyanka Chopra, for example, says in relation to constant questions about her love life, "You can ask, it's my prerogative whether I'll answer" (Johar 2017d). Despite this, that these actresses are not always open about their love lives does not matter to the media. While they are shamed for not being more open, the media considered need very little to construct a story about romance

in the lives of these women. Large amounts of deliberation emerge around these stories that are often built on assumption. From a critical standpoint, the media has a clear mandate and intention, and, therefore, do what they need to in order to meet that mandate. A lack of admission and openness from the actresses are not a deterrent. A common trope in this regard is the idea that if an actress is seen with a male often enough, one is able to speculate about possible romance between them. When the pair are not seen together in public for a while thereafter, speculation is that they have broken up. Once they are seen together again, speculation is that they are back together. Being together in this context can mean physically being seen together, but can also mean being seen together online through pictures, comments and follows.

Demonstrating this, while speculating about Sonam Kapoor's love life, *Bollywood Life* (Tripathi 2017d) noted the rumour that she is dating a businessman from London. Despite no confirmation from Kapoor or her representatives, they make reference to both Kapoor and her rumoured boyfriends social media to construct a story. They write, "These pictures are all we have to decode their love story!" (Tripathi 2017d). Despite their own admission that there are few facts to verify the story, the discourse around romance is nonetheless disseminated as required. Through their social media interaction, the publication praises the way in which they interact writing, "Their social media love-banter is the best kind! They always have something sweet and spicy to say about each other" (Iyengar 2017s).

Speculation and the opinions that follow are, therefore, peddled as fact until otherwise corrected. For example, during an appearance on *Koffee with Karan* (Johar 2017e), Johar rationalises to actor Tiger Shroff why people are sure he is dating actress Disha Patani. Johar explains,

> Everybody talks about you in this relationship now and of course you're denying it which might be true or wrong I don't know but uh like you walked in, you've been walking into places and events with her so everyone presumes you'll are dating (Johar 2017e).

In this instance, even with Shroff suggesting that he and Patani are just friends, this is not good enough for Johar or the media. There is less discursive significance in platonic friendship between a man and a woman, and, therefore, the need to highlight a romantic connection serves a greater purpose.

Similarly, *Bollywood Life* (Nayak 2017r) speculates about Alia Bhatt and Sidharth Malhotra's relationship. Despite noting a lack of confirmation from the pair about whether they are dating, the publication suggests that the pair "have certainly started dropping evident hints by engaging in PDA" (Nayak 2017r). In this context, the PDA links to simply being spotted together. The Indian context is different to western contexts where celebrities are photographed kissing and so on. Regulated by tradition, this public show of affection does not happen in India. At best, a celebrity couple that is not married rides in the same car, enter events together or possibly holds hands in public. Further demonstrating this in another article, *Bollywood Life* (Iyengar 2017x) explains,

> Alia Bhatt and Sidharth Malhotra are making way too many appearances like never before! Yes, they still haven't confirmed about their relationship but we can tell that they're definitely going strong! Although, initially, they were quite closed about their relationship as they avoided being clicked together. However, now, they couldn't care less… Unlike earlier when they would have their separate rides, lately, they've been roaming around together… Now that says a lot about what's cooking between the two lovebirds. Alia and Sid can't get enough of each other and we can't help swooning.

They further postulate in another article based on the joint car ride that the actress and actor shared,

> we are happy that they have finally decided to be open about what they mean to each other… We are actually very happy for them because they make a really beautiful couple. Sid's cute charm and Alia's chirpy self blend pretty well and we hope they go strong forever (Bhattacharjee 2017h).

That so much can be drawn from so little speaks to the media's desperation to emphasise the importance of romance. Discursively, it is not clear at all how a shared car ride can suggest that the people in the car are in a serious relationship, but the media nonetheless use what they can to construct the narrative that they need. Demonstrating this even further, the media considered speculate about a rumoured romance between Katrina Kaif and Aditya Roy Kapur. Here, *Bollywood Life* (Nayak 2017b) writes,

> Now we all know how the whole internet is abuzz about Katrina Kaif and Aditya Roy Kapur's growing fondness for each other. I mean, although the two have time and

> again reassured they are just friends…but you know how it works? The minute the two get spotted together, there's hell lotta speculations on what's brewing? Are they dating? Is Aditya the new man in Katrina's life?

What is particularly strange in this example is the way in which the publication straddles the boundary of commentator and spectator in relation to this speculation. While they often actively speculate about these romances, there are instance like the above quote where this speculation adopts more of a spectator tone, as if they themselves are watching other speculate. It appears that such instances are ways in which the publication attempts to properly connect with the audience, by not just adopting a conversational style but also presenting some insight into the audience experience. Furthermore, by blurring this boundary between commentator and spectator, they also work to naturalise similar ways of thinking with the audience, thereby further reifying dominant hegemonic ideologies. As such, when they do return to the role of commentator, audiences are even more familiar with their style and way of thinking. Thus, in relation to this rumoured romantic pair, the publication subsequently speculated the next day about their closeness based on Kaif's appearance on *Koffee with Karan*. They write,

> Not to mention, even when Katrina was asked if she's single and ready to mingle on *Koffee with Karan 5*, she didn't really nod in agreement. Instead, she maintained a suspicious silence with that smile on her face. Now what's actually brewing in Katrina and Aditya's love lives? Only time will tell. But of course, who can stop the gossipmongers from wagging their tongues? (Nayak 2017c)

Again, much like a joint car ride, these conclusions are drawn from very little observation. Even seemingly clear actions like nodding are muddied, such that "she didn't really nod" seemingly suggests she is specifically dating Kapur.

It is through examples like this that one is able to note an urgency in relation to the need for women to date. Being single and wanting to be single is almost presented as unfathomable. Finding a man is then highlighted as especially important in these scenarios. The most prominent example in this regard is actress Parineeti Chopra. Chopra saw little speculation about her love life and seems to have incorporated being single into one of her brand endorsements. As part of promotions ahead of Valentine's Day, Chopra in partnership with a cosmetic company promoted a special pack of cosmetics for lips. However, rather than take a romantic angle, the picture of a pouting Chopra was captioned "Because your #BFF is your

only Constant!", thereby encouraging young women to gift the pack to their best friends as part of marking the occasion (parineetichopra 2017). Additionally, it is suggested that these single women have been let down by men through the suggestion that their best friends are the only constant in their lives. From a capitalist point of view, this is clearly a gimmick marketed at single women that would assumedly not be partaking in big spending around Valentine's day. However, from a gender point of view, being single is presented as a problem. Just a few days earlier, this exact issue of Chopra being single was discussed on *Koffee with Karan* (Johar 2017f), when Indian tennis player Sania Mirza appeared on the show. The topic emerged in a similar segment to the one discussed in relation to Bhatt. As part of asking random questions to his guests, Johar asked Mirza what she would do if she woke up as their mutual friend Chopra. Her response, "I would find myself a boyfriend" (Johar 2017f). Johar agreed with the response saying, "ya she really should". Through both Mirza and Johar reiterating the need for Chopra to find a boyfriend, the broader discourse highlights the importance of women dating. This links to the need for women to fall in line with the status quo. As theoretical discussions suggest, romantic love and eventually marriage are ways in which women subscribe to this naturally. A single woman is, therefore, presented as unhappy and unfulfilled. While unhappiness cannot directly be noted in the example of Chopra, the tone of Mirza and Johar definitely alludes to an un-fulfilment within Chopra, as a result of being single.

Affectively, this links to the pressure placed on women as part of locating them within the trajectory that eventually will lead to marriage and children as Ahmed (2017) noted. In addition to the general societal pressure in this regard, actresses have also criticised the constant speculation on the part of the media. Alia Bhatt, for example, says life "I am tired of seeing the same headlines over and over again. Plus there's nothing much to react to" (Nayak 2017r). Similarly, Priyanka Chopra discusses how frustrating such speculation is during her appearance on *Koffee with Karan* (Johar 2017d), where she explains that "I meet someone for ten minutes and it becomes world news". Huma Qureshi voices a similar sentiment when she criticises the media for even going as far as speculating about her romancing men she considers brothers (PTI 2017a).

In one article, *Bollywood Life* (Bannerjee 2017b) attempts to justify the constant speculation by suggesting, "what to do…people have a lot of interest in their jodi[17]…The woes of being a celeb couple". Simply writing off criticism about their role in the constant pressure placed on women to settle down as part of celebrity culture demonstrates a lack of awareness and understanding of the impact of their work and content in society. Often, this leaves actresses frustrated. In turn, they become even more guarded about their personal lives, giving the media even less to work with when constructing and disseminating narratives about romance. Demonstrating this, during her appearance on *Koffee with Karan* (Johar 2017c), Sonam Kapoor demonstrated this after the host quizzed her about her love life. She explained firmly,

> I don't discuss my personal life. It's something that I think is very sacred and I just don't like talking about it 'cause it's just something that I…there is a reason that it's private and personal so I keep it private and personal (Johar 2017c).

Clearly opting to keep her personal life guarded, the actress further elaborated in another interview,

> There are a lot of other things which make you a whole person besides who you're dating. My personal life is out there because I've always been myself but if you're talking about personal life as in (context of) boyfriend, then I'll never talk about it (Tripathi 2017d).

Kapoor demonstrates an irritation with the constant speculation about her personal life. This not just because she wants to keep it private but also because she seemingly notes the way in which the media reduce her to who she is dating.

Linking to this constant speculation, Priyanka Chopra adopts a more pragmatic approach despite also speaking from a similar standpoint as Kapoor. She explains,

> I have never in my life encouraged or spoken about these personal situations. People write what they write, they gonna write what they have to believe, they will say what they have to. When there's a ring on the finger the world will know. I believe you're single till you're married (Johar 2017d).

Through this comment, Chopra recognises that the media is going to speculate and there is little she can do to change that. Nonetheless, she chooses to reclaim some power in the situation, explaining that when she has an engagement to announce, she will do so and until

[17] Hindi word for couple

then she will not personally entertain the constant speculation. Both examples demonstrate Kapoor and Chopra's awareness of the systemic nature of such speculation. It is this same system that has clear expectations of how they should perform their femininity and the little power they can claim in this context, is keeping their personal life as private as possible.

Despite this, the media continue to create and disseminate content about the love lives of these actresses. Beyond just the importance of having a man in her life, the media also suggests that once a woman has found her man, her world needs to centre around him. They suggest that a woman should always put her man first, no matter what. This is demonstrated in a number of ways through coverage of these young women. For example, on the occasion of her birthday, *Bollywood Life* (Shah 2017c) suggests that "the main question" is whether or not Bhatt is going to choose to celebrate the occasion with her rumoured boyfriend or her friends or everyone together. While little clarity is given about why this is the main question, one cannot help but assume that this links to the need for a woman to prioritise the man in her life in all instances. Drawing such a conclusion is further justified through the example of Deepika Padukone. The publication subtly yet passive aggressively reprimanded the actress for not spending time with her rumoured boyfriend Ranveer Singh during and after he underwent a surgical procedure. They write,

> Apparently the actor is on bed rest now and since Deepika is back in town we thought that the first thing she would do after coming back would be visiting Mr Singh. But instead, Deepika was seen chilling with her friends today evening. Now that she is back in Mumbai she is making sure she catches up with her buddies before she gets busy again (Rajani 2017i).

While their critique is not outwardly aggressive or explicit, suggesting that they thought she would do one thing and she did another neatly points out a divergence. Rather than rushing to the side of her rumoured boyfriend, she socialised with friends. The further reminder that she will soon get busy with work again also suggests that giving her free time fully to her friends is not good enough. While neither the publication nor the audience know what Padukone did or didn't do to support her rumoured boyfriend, just this speculation alone reminds women about the importance of prioritising the man in her life.

As part of a woman prioritising her man, the media also suggest that there are certain boundaries within which a woman should conduct herself once she is in a relationship. When

these boundaries are crossed in a celebrity context, the error is pointed out in the media as part of a broader lesson in gender conduct (Walzer: 2008). As such, Padukone was also criticised for a joke she made while promoting her Hollywood film on an American talk show. On the show, she jokingly responded to a question about romance rumours between her and her co-star Vin Diesel, saying she was indeed romancing him in her head where she also had babies with him. This was not received well in the media considered, with *Bollywood Life* (Nayak 2017g) writing,

> But the fact that Deepika went onto make such a bold statement about Vin, despite being in a relationship with Ranveer Singh has not really gone down well with the audience…You won't believe, some of the viewers are literally slamming Deepika for being highly rude and disrespectful towards Ranveer for they believe, if she couldn't mention her boyfriend then she also has no right to gush about Vin, knowing he himself is a family man…Trust me, the comments on Deepika's Ellen episode has got everyone so divided right now that even you for a second would be confused what to believe – was she really disrespectful towards Ranveer? Or was she just trying to be funny and failed to pull off the joke?

They eventually noted it was likely a joke and that both her co-star and rumoured boyfriend were likely not offended, but they nonetheless wrote "but yea, fans for all that you know are softies at heart so we don't really blame them for reacting this way" (Nayak 2017g). Much like the example around Katrina Kaif's rumoured romance, here again the publication blurs the line between commentator and spectator. In addition to using this style to connect with the audience in ways noted above, the publication also hides behind unnamed fans or social media users when disseminating more critical and conservative viewpoints. Despite appearing as though they are merely informing audiences about how people reacted to Padukone's joke in this instance, that these reactions directly align with broader understandings of romantic love and how women should treat their men is not unintentional. In this instance Padukone seemingly crossed the boundary of acceptable in relation to how to prioritise her man and this transgression was, therefore, made clear.

It is also suggested that when a woman fails to conduct herself properly in the context of a romantic relationship, tensions may arise. Still using Padukone as an example, the publication latches on to the previous example to speculate about her closeness to Diesel, wondering how

her rumoured boyfriend feels about it. This subsequently led to articles about their rumoured breakup, where the publication explains,

> A lot has been speculated about Deepika Padukone's troubled relationship with Ranveer Singh. It all started after Deepika ventured into Hollywood. While some say her closeness with xXx co-star Vin diesel has bothered Ranveer. Many suggest how long distance could have paved way to insecurities and countless differences; precisely also the reason why you don't even get to see Ranveer and Deepika together anymore (Nayak 2017s).

This links back to an earlier point where it is assumed that rumoured couples have broken up primarily because they are never spotted together in public. The publication further speculates that this is also confirmed by the actress sharing a picture on her Instagram account that featured her ex-boyfriend. This is presented as extremely insulting to her rumoured current boyfriend and, therefore, makes it understandable if he is upset. However, the publication fails to contextualise that this was a promotional image from a previous film she did. The image was from a popular song in the film, where the characters celebrated the festival of *Holi* and so the actress used the image to wish her fans well for the festival of *Holi*. Nonetheless, *Bollywood Life* (Nayak 2017s) argues,

> I mean, if you are trying to mend ways with your boyfriend, you obviously wouldn't want to make things worse by sharing a picture with your ex, right? But clearly, DP doesn't care a damn; at least that's what this picture suggests. We wonder how Ranveer must have reacted to this picture.

Such a quote not only introduces and legitimises issues of jealousy in the romantic context, it also clearly suggests what is right and wrong. Padukone posting the picture is presented as very disrespectful to her rumoured partner and it is further presented as careless on her part. It is clear that more is expected from women in this regard and Padukone's example works to confirm that.

Additionally, the issue of jealousy is another factor that emerged when considering the nuance of ideal romantic relationships as per the mainstream media. What was clear quite quickly was that much like in the Padukone example, jealousy was something mainly recognised when felt by men. This suggests that men have the right to claim women, while women should be content with just that. Jealousy in the context of women linked more to being catty and competitive. Demonstrating this, when Katrina Kaif signed on to star in a

film with her ex-boyfriend, *Bollywood Life* (Tripathi 2017f) quickly suggested that the actor's new girlfriend was insecure about this casting. While little detail is given to qualify the supposed jealousy, in comparison to the example of Padukone and her boyfriend, the article provocatively states, "As the famous saying goes there is no smoke without fire. Don't you think there is a slight possibility that Katrina and Salman might get back together?" (Tripathi 2017f). While the entire premise is hypothetical, the gendered nature of the exchange cannot be ignored. Blame is regularly placed on the woman, while the man is either the victim or the innocent bystander. Despite the fact that Kaif's co-star would be equally to blame if something should happen between them, the blame is seemingly (and hypothetically) placed on Kaif's presence alone. In both instances of jealousy, the women are to blame because either they acted in ways that were insulting to the man thereby prompting and validating his jealousy, or they randomly seduced a man despite knowing he was in a relationship rendering him innocent in the context. Thus, in addition to providing examples about appropriate and inappropriate conduct in romantic relationships to the audience, these examples also work to naturalise the power men have in romantic contexts.

### 6.2.2 Impending engagements

As noted theoretically, this power is further maintained through the institution of marriage itself. As such, most of the discourse around relationships in the media considered tend to eventually lead to conversations about marriage if the people in the relationship are dating long enough. If love is given huge importance in women's lives, by default so too is marriage. In an Indian context, Bhopal (2011: 433) explains that "…marriage is seen as an economic and social bond for religious and cultural groups", that also links to and reflects a family's status.

As such, one is able to regularly note instances where marriage comes up in relation to these actresses. Some of these instances are even in passing and may have little link to the current status of the actress's love life. For example, when talking about Sonakshi Sinha, actor Shahid Kapoor described her as "marriageable" (Johar 2017a). Ranveer Singh also described Deepika Padukone as "marriage material" (Nayak 2017g). Similarly, Alia Bhatt explains that one of her friends and co-stars Varun Dhawan would regularly express concern that she would end up unmarried and alone (Johar 2017g). Dhawan added to this in explaining, "I'll be very happy. And I always told her this that I want to one day, see you married with children" (Johar 2017g). Worth noting is the way in which a woman's life is defined in

relation to marriage and children, such that it would make people around her happy when it happens. *Bollywood Life* (Nayak 2017o) worked with a similar trope when they asked Kangana Ranaut, "Do you feel the maternal instincts setting in? Is that why you want to get married?" To this, the actress retorted, "Well, that's not the reason to get married but to have a companion is the reason". Such a response is rare in the media because, while the importance of love is emphasised in a marriage, the push towards marriage is regularly linked to having children.

The issue of marriage is, therefore, presented as a point of pressure for young women, particularly as they get older (older in this context links to early thirties). For example, while Sonam Kapoor has made it explicitly clear that she will not talk about her relationships in the media, *Bollywood Life* (Iyengar 2017s) continue to speculate about her relationship and future wedding. Noting that the actress's mother is very happy with her rumoured boyfriend, the publication writes,

> Now we all find the pair a very cute kind but turns out Sonam has received a big yay from mother Sunita Kapoor over her boyfriend choice! You heard that right. The actress' mommy is keen on her daughter committing to her relationship to the next level (Iyengar 2017s).

This excerpt then actively adds pressure on the rumoured couple to get married. In an Indian context, this is directly linked to family approval, where family opinions of potential life partners are given a lot of importance. This is further demonstrated with the example of Sonakshi Sinha who was rumoured to be getting married. Of this, *Bollywood Life* (Chauhan 2017) explains,

> It was reported that Sonakshi wasn't taking any new projects as she was planning to get hitched with him but Sona rubbished it. In an interview, when the actress was asked about the same Sonakshi lashed out saying, 'No comments! Do you see a ring on my finger? No na? Then? Does this answer your question?'

However, they also suggest that the wedding did not happen because her mother did not approve of the marriage as a result of the rumoured boyfriend having been married once before. Marriage in this context is, therefore, presented as a family affair, where individuals wait for familial approval before considering the next step. Bhopal (2011) attributes these close ties to family in an Indian context more broadly to a sense of community. She further

explains, "…marriage and having children are considered to be paramount concerns for parents and arranging a marriage for their children strengthens notions of community for family members" (2011: 433). This also links back to issues of status, where one's social standing is reiterated through the grandeur of one's family wedding as well as through the success of the marriage of one's relative.

Bringing this understanding to the data, most speculation about impending marriage was given to Anushka Sharma and her cricketer boyfriend Virat Kohli. However, *Bollywood Life* (Nayak 2017d) was quick to note their families had not yet met to finalise the wedding. Nonetheless, they write,

> In fact, for the longest time we've been hearing how Virat has been more keen to settle down with Anushka than his ladylove. So we guess, now is the perfect time to ring in the wedding bells for Virat and Anushka? (Nayak 2017d)

As such, much of the content about Sharma was in relation to this speculation about when she would be settling down. Importantly, media content then also regularly emphasised and demonstrated their compatibility based on their (the media's) opinion that the two were ready for marriage. For example, *Bollywood Life* (Iyengar 2017l) writes that as a couple they,

> don't go out of their way to express what's between them but also don't engage in public PDAs. Instead, they plan their vacations and keep to themselves. However, whenever they do make some cute revelations about each other or are spotted together, our heart skips a beat.

Again, despite highlighting the limited facts that they have, the detailed speculation nonetheless alludes to their love and the way in which the pair gets along well. The emphasis placed on their romantic connection directly links to the common assumption that a happy marriage is one built on love (Singh 2013). This is demonstrated again when the cricketer wished both Sharma and his mother well on Women's Day on social media. Of this action, *Bollywood Life* (Nayak 2017q) writes,

> Now can it get any more adorable than this? I mean, he's named Anushka right after his mom – if this doesn't sum up Anushka's importance in Virat's life then I dunno what will. Get married, you too! (sic).

This then reiterates the importance of marriage and encourages women to seek marriage as soon as they have found a compatible partner.

## *6.3 Wife*

In terms of the data collected, there was no data from *Bollywood Life* or *Koffee with Karan* about actresses who are wives in relation to their love lives. This in itself is an interesting finding, as one is forced to wonder why romance is seemingly not an important issue for women who are wives. What one can conclude in this regard is that it is likely that the trajectory is established and emphasised in content about young women and, therefore, young women do enough of the gender work already. How a woman is meant to act when she is dating someone is seemingly similar once married, as the institution of marriage itself merely solidifies and legitimises those expectations. Love in this context is commitment to marriage and the expectations of women in relation to marriage remain clear. While one would have assumed that there would have been some content about keeping romance within a marriage, this is not the case. One is, therefore, also able to conclude that in the larger trajectory, marriage is merely a way of re-inscribing and re-legitimising the patriarchal status quo before one has children. It is a necessary step but not an important one as the most important steps for women link to finding the right man and having children with him. Her youth is, therefore dedicated to the emotional labour of finding and keeping a man and thereafter her time is dedicated to her children. The role of marriage as a re-inscriber of patriarchy is, therefore, especially significant because, as a woman eventually has children, she is expected to socialise her children directly in line with the status quo as part of her role as the primary caregiver.

### 6.3.1 Love and marriage

Linking to this, when looking at the Instagram posts of some of the key actresses that emerge in the data collected from mainstream Indian media, such observations are seemingly confirmed. The three married actresses that have posts about love and/or their marriage on their Instagram profiles during the data collection period were Asin, Bipasha Basu and Sunny Leone. Through their posts, these women highlight the importance of their husband in their lives, thereby maintaining mainstream narratives around gender and love. Asin (simply.asin 2017), for example, celebrated her first marriage anniversary during the data collection period and, therefore, shared three separate pictures about this occasion and more broadly her marriage. In the first, focus is placed on a man and a woman (presumably the actress and her

husband) holding hands which the caption symbolises as “a year of togetherness” (simply.asin 2017). The actress then shares images from her wedding ceremony, where it is made clear that she is in the midst of her happily ever after moment as a result of this togetherness. In the third post, she posts a picture of what appears to be her parents posing with her and her husband at their wedding ceremony with an accompanying caption that highlights the strength she draws from her parents and her husband as a family unit (simply.asin 2017).

In similar fashion, Bipasha Basu and Sunny Leone also demonstrate the benefit of togetherness on their Instagram profiles where they regularly post about the joys of having a husband and experiencing the world together. These experiences range from everyday things like sharing meals together to more special experiences like vacations and so on. Both actresses pay particular attention to highlighting and appreciating the ways in which their respective husbands indulge and spoil them. Leone (sunnyleone 2017), for example, shares a post about how her “awesome” husband arranged a butler for them while they shopped at a mall in Dubai. This very much aligns with the regal fairy tale narrative that these actresses seemingly identify with, as further justification for the materialistic nature of contemporary femininity. Relatedly, Basu shared a number of posts about the Valentine’s Day party her husband arranged for her. Through these posts, Basu highlights how “happy and blessed” she is, further stating that her husband knows her heart very well (bipashabasu 2017). The posts also show that in additional to the designer bag that he gifted her, Basu’s husband also presented her with a hand-written love letter. The caption that accompanied the post about the love letter was particularly interesting, as Basu expressed, “Now I know I was right in believing fairy tales…they do happen. Thank you for making me feel like a princess always…Your words are as beautiful as your heart…” (bipashabasu 2017). The fairy tale narrative is one Basu clearly identifies with despite its gendered nature, as she also shared a post to her husband with a quote that reads “I spent my days waiting for you, searching the crowds for you face. I stopped breathing the moment you recognized me, as you captured my soul with your gaze” (bipashabasu 2017). Emphasising the success of their fit, Basu not only demonstrates the restlessness she felt prior to her marriage (presented as somewhat of a void in her life) but also the completion she felt once she found his love.

What these posts highlight is not just the importance of togetherness, but also the importance of a woman settling down with the right man: someone who spoils her, protects her, completes her and loves her. As one locates this in the bigger picture of gender, love and romance, this begins to appear as problematic. This problem is not because a woman is appreciating her husband but rather because of the ways in which this is done, such that emphasis is placed on the happiness that a woman experiences once she marries. The posts by Asin, Basu and Leone all align with existing mainstream narratives around the importance of marriage in a woman's life. Through their posts, they highlight both this importance and the benefits that follow marriage. In the broader picture, this is especially noteworthy considering the ways in which young women are discouraged from being single, thereby presenting no additional alternate to a woman marrying and settling down.

However, what is lacking in the posts of these three actresses is any specific lessons around gender performance in this regard. The hard work of marriage and long-term love and commitment is completely ignored. At most, through the fairy tale narrative, women are encouraged to adopt a princess role that allows a prince to cherish and protect her. However, little can be concluded about the actual gender performance required to maintain the love in a marriage. Love is presented as important to women but also something that is seemingly maintained by the institution of marriage alone. Subscribing to the re-inscription of patriarchy in her life once she finds the right man is, therefore, presented as enough to maintain the love she is socialised to seek desperately. Mainstream narratives like fairy tale love stories, thus encourage women to not only seek such romance but also fall into specific roles within these romances.

### *6.4 Mothers*

Within these roles, women are encouraged to see motherhood as the inevitable yet desirable culmination of long-term romantic love. However, much like the limited mainstream data that emerged around actresses who are wives and romantic love, the mainstream data around actresses who are mothers and romantic love is also limited. Little to no focus is placed on maintaining romantic love as a family grows. Rather, on one hand, one is forced to assume that the same romantic, sexy and hyper feminine expectations of a woman apply in addition to the new expectations relating to her role as a mother, which evokes a different kind of love that is seemingly more important than romance. The data that did emerge in relation to these

women then focused primarily on those instances where these women go against the expectation of the status quo by getting divorced.

### 6.4.1 Divorce

Discourse within this data focuses on affability of the split, as well as the impact of divorce on the children involved. As their primary caregivers, this impact is often blamed on the mother. Demonstrating this in relation to the divorce of Malaika Arora Khan, *Bollywood Life* (DNA 2017f) writes,

> In most troubled marriages, one person wants out, while the other wants to fix things. And though he has never talked about it, it has been amply clear that Arbaaz was the one trying to save this marriage.

Again, through speculation alone such an observation is made and presented as fact. This is likely as a result of Malaika generally not speaking about the divorce to the media while her husband does (despite the above quote stating otherwise). Furthermore, highlighting that the husband still wants the marriage to work links to broader society and the assumption that marriages are meant to work based on the work women put into it. Women are tasked with the emotional labour of romantic love and so when it doesn't work in public examples, the media seemingly blames this on the failure of the woman to work hard enough.

Additionally, despite the blame being placed on women, effort is also made to ensure that the divorce does not inconvenience the man. This is concluded from the constant emphasis on the amicable nature of the split. While a conscious effort at maintaining harmony for the children is important, one cannot ignore who does the majority of the emotional labour in these contexts. Considering that the emotional labour of the marriage and subsequent split is likely carried entirely by women, the nature of the split is one of the few things that would likely have a lasting impact on men, based on their continued role as a father. As such, talking about Arora Khan's divorce, *Bollywood Life* (Nayak 2017n) notes,

> So Malaika Arora and Arbaaz Khan were spotted chilling together this afternoon. A picture of Arbaaz and Malaika's family has been doing the rounds on the internet where the estranged couple is happily seen posing for a family pic. But before you wonder if this again is a sign they are getting back together for real then let's clarify, the couple is just assuring their divorce doesn't affect their relationship with each other's families.

Divorce is, therefore, encouraged to be amicable if unavoidable. Further highlighting this through the example of Arora Khan, *Bollywood Life* (Nayak 2017n) quotes an interview that the ex-husband did where he explains,

> Just because we're separating doesn't mean we have to be worried about each other's equations. I have a child with her, so we have to have a cordial and a great relationship. We're very amicable with the split we had…I have a growing up child, so there's a lot of parenting responsibilities and duties we have to do and it can only happen if the atmosphere between the two of us is very conducive and normal. We both are extremely mature and can handle this.

In similar fashion, when Nandita Das announced her divorce, the start of her announcement said, "Thankfully, it is very amicable. Our son is our foremost priority and as parents of a delightful and sensitive child we request that his and our privacy be respected" (Raveendran 2017). Again, while the focus on the impact divorce has on children is important in the way that it demonstrates the priorities in these couple's lives, the gendered nature of divorce should not be ignored. The sense one gets based on coverage of both divorces in the data collected implicitly suggest that the process of divorce is meant to be, and, therefore, seems to be, a lot more trying for the women involved. They are not able to talk about it with as much ease as their ex-husbands do. Arora Khan, for example, chose to keep it almost entirely private, while Das indicated that "these are difficult times and I would appreciate some sensitivity" (Raveendran 2017). In contrast, Arora Khan's ex-husband gave in-depth interviews about his life after divorce, his love life and so on (DNA 2017f), while Das' husband explained that despite his divorce he chooses to still be "an eternal optimist and believe in love and all that comes with it" (Raveendran 2017). Men are afforded the freedom to do this only because of the gendered nature of romantic love and these examples highlight that. While girls and women are encouraged to place extreme emphasis on romantic love and marriage as part of maintaining patriarchy and supporting men, the same is not the case for men and how they love. As Gregoratto (2017) explains through the division of emotional labour in the context of romantic love, should a relationship end, men are able to walk away and replace their partner quicker and with more ease primarily because the investments in the equations were never equal. In a patriarchal context, based on the expectations of women in relation to the men that they love, it, therefore, becomes clear why love is given so much importance in their lives. Mainstream understandings of love legitimise patriarchy while

marriage re-inscribes it. The dissolution of a marriage, therefore, challenges this carefully crafted status quo.

## *6.5 Conclusion*

In conclusion, it becomes clear within this chapter that much of the data does indeed align with broader theoretical considerations around romantic love and the ways in which it is gendered. In demonstrating this alignment, this chapter highlights the similarities between this work and a contemporary, urban Indian space. This is important because often perspectives around romantic love in India are clouded by perceptions and limited understandings of arranged marriage. As Ahmed (2012) notes, through these understandings a dichotomised notion emerges, where romance and love is linked to western societies, while arranged marriages are linked to eastern societies. She explains,

> 'arranged marriages' have tended to be portrayed through idealized Eurocentric frameworks – as ancient and rigid duty-bound systems that suppress individual freedoms and subjugate women that are sometimes confused with 'forced' marriages and are still contrasted against 'love marriages', which presume free choice in one's matrimonial partner (Ahmed 2012: 193).

While arranged marriages do still happen in an Indian context, to reduce an entire population's engagement with romantic love to this is to other that nation and its people. What this chapter, therefore, does is present, theorise and normalise the actual everyday notions of romantic love in this space. Much like spaces in the west, romantic love in India is also linked to issues of settling down where a woman needs to find the right man as part of re-entering and re-locating herself within the patriarchal status quo. As a result, the mainstream media in India that engages urban Indian audiences (via the internet and cable television) thus also disseminate and encouraged romanticised notions of this process. Furthermore, the Bollywood actresses in this regard are presented as clear examples of the success and failures of romantic love based on their action. The message given to audiences thereby reiterates the gendered nature of this love and the ways in which women are encouraged to willingly seek, accept and maintain such patriarchal notions as part of fostering a crucial element of their own identity as a woman.

## Chapter 7: Conclusion

During an interview in 2019 on American talk show *The View* (2019), Priyanka Chopra was asked what dating was like in India. In her response she explained,

> Look, there's urban India and then there's rural India and there's different states that think differently so culturally India is a very very diverse country so different people react differently but modern India today is in this amazing precepit (sic) of change where women and men themselves are taking charge of their own lives…especially women are coming out there finding their voices, finding jobs so it's a really interesting temperament… (2019).

In noting the diversity of India, Chopra, one of the biggest Bollywood stars, demonstrates the need for nuance in understanding Indian society today. No single understanding is going to be adequate for a space as diverse and complex as India. However, in attempting to make sense of the contemporary urban Indian society Chopra mentions, this project presents a better understanding of the complexities of contemporary urban Indian femininity(ies). Through engaging English medium mainstream media texts from India, the project captures the nuances of the ways in which the media uses coverage of Bollywood actresses to teach audiences about gender ideals in this context. That Bollywood is popular beyond just India speaks to the way in which the ideological reach of these texts is global. While not the first nor the sole carrier of India and Indian culture to the world, Bollywood in its totality of film and relating media has emerged as a vehicle that has extended this even further.

As a grandchild of Indian immigrants in South Africa, I have grown up in a space that has been an eclectic mix of cultures. This, coupled with the advent of globalisation, has meant that the media I have consumed has reflected that heterogeneous compilation of my own identity. Although not in its traditional sense, a diaspora experience is part of my own upbringing and life. Bollywood contributed significantly to this reading of self and my cultural heritage. The value and power of *sanskar* is pervasive to anyone raised within this tradition, whether in India or in its complex diasporas. My personal interest grew, as I became increasingly fascinated in what appeared to be a transferability of Indianness through film and television, but even more, as this study has shown, through popular culture that displayed their own unique celebrity cultures and conceptions around fame and performances of glamour. Despite certain visible similarities between western manifestations of the same,

the crux around Indianness and *sanskar* largely remains. Linking to this, as a feminist scholar, I was especially fascinated with these experiences because in my personal realm, expectations of good Indian girls were always different to expectations of me, as a young man. I am thus aware of my positionality both in a scholarly capacity and more personally, and that while the work is not meant to be tainted by this, it is deeply important to how much of it was conceived and developed.

Furthermore, research about the western dominated popular spaces are often still most common and thus given much attention. This was especially true for the area of personal academic interest – postfeminism. It was here that I encountered the arguments of Spencer et al. (2018), as well as the work of Dosekun (2015), which in turn became a major influence in the conceptualisation of this project. In recognising the issue with the assumption that western centric theoretical interventions are meant to make sense of different lived experiences around the world, I knew that this where I wanted my project to take flight from. This linked specifically to moving away from these assumptions, thereby presenting a picture of contemporary femininity and womanhood outside of the west, grappling with and demonstrating all its nuanced complexities that are ignored in western centric iterations of understanding. As such, I turned to Bollywood for an empirical base of the project.

As a star system even more complex than the one seen in Hollywood, Bollywood provides data that despite differences can largely be understood via existing theoretical discussions. However, in surveying existing literature on Bollywood as a popular media text in relation to gender, focus seemed to be on the representations of gender in the films exclusively. Though significant in their own right, based on the theoretical discussions that sparked my interest in these issues, I saw importance in the need to move away from filmic representations and consider the nuances of media representations of the stars off screen specifically. This was because of the ways in which the role celebrities play in contemporary society now goes beyond just their work. Meaning is made through them and relating this understanding to gender allows us to get a better understanding of the urban realities of India's emerging middle class – often the target market of the media texts considered in this project.

What, therefore, emerges, is an interdisciplinary project that combines issues of femininity, feminism and popular culture. Focusing on mainstream, English medium media content about

Bollywood, the project specifically considers what is being said about Bollywood actresses. The novelty and significance of this focus links to the observation that, while there is indeed existing work on Bollywood stars, in-depth focus on the way in which these women in particular are used as exemplars of gender in a contemporary space is limited. Furthermore, in focusing on material about all actresses in the data collected, the project was also able to extend the emerging understandings to various facets of womanhood. This links to the other major influence of this project. Here, the project benefited from the important scholarship of McRobbie (2003) in relation to the ways in which the media disseminates targeted and gendered content to women in different phases of their life. In recognising this, the project was able to draw on a dual thematic approach for a closer analysis, where themes from the data were considered while also reflecting on how these considerations pan out in relation to the phase of a woman's life.

This chapter, therefore, works to demonstrate the ways in which the project as a whole has properly accomplished this; revisiting the journey of the project as a whole. The project is anchored by the following research questions:

1. What are the nuances that emerge in Indian manifestations of postfeminism through mainstream media coverage of Bollywood actresses?
2. How do these nuances complicate dominant western understandings and representations of these issues, and do they provide new possibilities for understanding different kinds of celebrity womanhood?

In setting out to do this, one of the biggest strengths of the project has been the way in which it has been able to successfully pull together seemingly autonomous areas of theoretical inquiry into one cohesive theoretical foundation. Where Bollywood as an area of study has largely been understood as independent, this project merges this field with a variety of key areas in ways that brings in a previously missing intimacy in understandings of the space. Through considering areas of postfeminism, feminism, Indian femininity, gender and affect, femininity as well as celebrity culture an arena emerges that allows one to properly consider the meanings behind mainstream media representations of Bollywood actresses. In understanding the nature of contemporary femininity outside of India via postfeminism, one is able to use these discussions to consider how this fuses with understandings of idealised Indian femininity, which in many ways is meant to be a lot more measured and controlled as

a result of the roles of culture and tradition here. Furthermore, in acknowledging the role of celebrities in society today, understanding affect allows one to properly locate the explicit and implicit lessons around gender in the media texts considered.

With the theoretical foundation established, the project then presents a chapter on the high profile weddings of two popular Bollywood actresses. This chapter (three), works to contextualise the analytical chapters that follow. The chapter does this through considering the way in which these weddings occurred on a global platform (piquing the interests of media publications around the globe), thereby presenting Indian femininity(ies) to the world. Though the chapter is a clearly indicated break from the project's methodology, looking at mainstream media discussions around these weddings and these actresses as brides allowed the project to use two globally popular examples to demonstrate the ways in which Indian femininity(ies) manifests in these media texts. The chapter also demonstrates the inability to only make sense of these gender performance by western centric theoretical discussions. This in turn affirms the value of the project as a whole, in that understanding the complexities of Indian femininity(ies) proves increasingly valuable as the stardom of some of these women continues to grow globally.

Furthermore, this chapter also highlights the strength of the dual thematic approach of the analytical chapters. That both Padukone and Chopra were unmarried and categorised in the young women category in the original data collection allows one to see the explicit shift in the ways in which media discourse exists in relation to these two actresses as young women first and then as wives. As a result, this highlighted the importance of the choice to structure the theme-based analytical chapters within the additional themes of young woman, wife and mother. While the repetition of these exact themes in three chapters may appear strange, in actuality, it is a strength of this project. This is because through such an organisation, one is able to clearly observe, note and understand the ways in which feminine identities shift, change, evolve and sometimes stagnate, based on the role of culture and tradition in this context.

As such, the first analytical chapter of the project (chapter four) considers femininity and work. The most important finding in this chapter links to the way in which westernised solutions to the tensions that emerge between a woman's personal and professional life are

largely not applicable in the Indian context. While in the western context women are encouraged to do as much as possible in terms of juggling work and family responsibilities, this is not the case in the Indian context. Locating women within the domestic as part of normalising these expectations and rendering her foreign in the work environment is instead emphasised. While young women are given the most freedom to pursue a career, it is constantly made clear that this is neither constant nor fulfilling; with true fulfilment coming from family responsibility. As a woman progresses to wifehood, the expectations rise further in that while married women are able to continue working this should not be at the expense of the domestic space. If one thinks about this in western terms of work life balance, the understanding for married Indian women is that an ideal balance in this regard is one that tilts towards the domestic. This expectation works in conjunction with forthcoming expectations that emerge once these women have children. As such, working is also presented as something that takes time away from focusing on settling in a marriage and trying to have children. By the time these women are mothers, their careers should be distant distractions that ideally are forgotten. Focus is meant to be fully on the child and her or his needs, thereby reiterating the need for a mother to be a full time responsibility. Additionally, it is suggested that should a woman who is also a mother continue to work, she should only do so when the child's needs are less demanding. Furthermore, in returning to work, part of being a good mother involves the woman constantly feeling and expressing guilt as a result of being away from her child. Thus, work life balance as a way of making sense of femininity and work is hardly helpful in the Indian context.

The second analytical chapter (chapter five) looks at findings around bodily femininity. The overarching ideals in relation to this theme are postfeminist in nature in that they focus on and highlight the need for a woman, no matter her life category, to be thin and glamorous at all times. The work of femininity to achieve this is naturalised as self-investment. Thus, through engaging media content about these actresses, women are made to clearly recognise what will and will not work in relation to the clothes they wear, as well as how they do their makeup and style their hair. Despite the fact that these looks are often completely styled by a team of professionals, everyday women are meant to draw inspiration from them. As such, this hyper femininity has very clear specifications and the media clearly present these actresses as exemplars for this. Equal emphasis is also placed on those instances where the actresses and their overall looks are not meeting the hegemonic standards identified by the

media. Through this scrutiny, women engaging this content are unequivocally shown what to do and what not to do in this regard. The shift that plays out in relation to the categories of womanhood plays out in relation to the sexiness that is often coupled with postfeminist understandings of hyper femininity. Young women are given the most room to embrace this sexiness, even being encouraged to do so. However, that the boundaries of this embrace are guided by *sanskar* is obvious. Embracing sexiness here is very different and comparatively more conservative to what it is in the west, even in youth. These boundaries then begin to draw in as a woman marries, where she is expected to be a lot more conscious of the need to find a balance in her gender performance between contemporary and traditional. The expectation here is of a more measured glamor. This shifts even more as a woman becomes a mother. While actresses are given a bit more room to exist based on the overly glamorous nature of their industry, the issue of respectability is clear for women who are mothers. Despite this she is still expected to maintain a thin body and continue to make an effort to embrace the appropriate version of hyper femininity.

Finally, the third analytical chapter (chapter six) links to femininity and love. One of the biggest findings in this chapter is that love in the context of contemporary urban Indian femininity(ies) aligns with western understandings of the same. This stands in stark contrast to the stereotypical assumption of primarily arranged marriages in India as a while. Through coverage of these actresses, love is actually presented as important in the lives of women, especially young women. Absent from these instances of love and dating, however, is a casualness that is seen early on in celebrity relationships in western media texts. Here, the intention of dating is almost always presented as something that will lead to a longer-term commitment like marriage. Marriage is presented as something that is extremely important in the lives of young women. Discursively, this is also understood as a way in which patriarchal traditions and the related respectability politics can be re-introduced and re-inscribed into the lives of these women. This is confirmed in the way in which love becomes less important in the lives of women who are married. This is concluded less from what is explicitly said and more from what is not said at all in the media considered. While the love from youth may extend through to the marriage, lessons around love and marriage are not given much importance in the media considered. Recalling the shifts that occur once married in the other analytical chapters of this project, one realises why marriage is presented as important. Marriage is what sets the shift towards a more traditional femininity in motion. More so in

this theme, it is presented as a mere required pit stop on the proverbial road to more important things namely - motherhood. The requirement of marriage in this regard links to the respectability politics of the context. Once a mother, love is not all about the children. Motherly love is presented as even more important than romantic love, based on the notion that being a mother is the most important role in a woman's life, thereby centring the child as the most important responsibility in her life.

As a result, the project has presented a clear and detailed understanding of contemporary urban Indian femininity(ies) via the ideals disseminated in mainstream media texts about Bollywood actresses. There are, however, a small number of limitations to the study that need to be acknowledged. The nature and boundaries of a PhD project dictate that such limitations are unavoidable based on the constraints regarding the overall length of the thesis and what is achievable in a project this size. As such, when considering what these limitations were for this project, four main issues emerged. The first is the selection of only three different sources of data (*BollywoodLife, Koffee with Karan* and Instagram). While these three sources yielded a corpus of data that challenged the limits of what this project could manage, opening up to more English medium mainstream media sources would have had its benefits. The primary benefit in this regard links to the potentially more far reaching argument one could have made as a result of engaging a larger variety of media platforms. Secondly, while capping the data collection period at three months was adequate for the project, like the use of more media platforms, a longer data collection period would have likely yielded an even more detailed analysis. While the reality is that much of these texts are plugged into similar narratives and more data would have required an even more extensive analysis process, greater detail in a project of this nature is rarely a negative. This is especially because it is the view of this project that measuring nuance is best done when considering as much data as possible.

Thirdly, the reality of dealing with subject matter based on real people means that their lives are not limited to the data collection period of one project. So, while in the months of January, February and March of 2017 the actresses mentioned in the data were able to be categorised a certain way (in relation to the three categories of young woman, wife and mother), between then and the culmination of this project some things have changed. In particular, young women Deepika Padukone, Priyanka Chopra, Anushka Sharma and Sonam

Kapoor have all since married, while Asin and Sunny Leone have both become mothers. A project with a larger time frame in particular may have been able to analyse material before, during and after the changes in the phases of these actresses lives. This in turn would have provided an even more tangible insight into the shifts in femininity that the mainstream media expect of women as they move through life and its stages. Finally, in any project about a space outside of where the researcher is based, it would be ideal for the researcher to visit that space as part of better understanding the nuances at play. While I was not able to travel to India for a variety of reasons, including the access to the necessary funds, the project remains strong in its analysis based on the fact that the data analysed focuses on globally transferrable media texts in particular. These texts and popular culture flows can be accessed and engaged throughout the world and that is exactly what happens for the millions of people that engage this content as part of their regular Bollywood consumption.

Despite these limitations, I am of the view that the project has still been able to successfully answer the research questions and contribute significantly to wider scholarship in areas of postfeminist studies and celebrity culture specifically. Demonstrating this, while existing theoretical discussions accurately capture the role of celebrities in contemporary society, this is largely done via western celebrities. Through adding discussions around Bollywood celebrities one is able to properly recognise the power and influence these Bollywood stars have in their own right. Moreover, these discussions present new dimensions to understandings of celebrity culture because of the uniqueness of the context in relation to trivial expectations, like an airport look, as well as more significant expectations around Indianness, culture and tradition.

In recognising the importance of issues like Indianness, culture and tradition, this project was able to properly present a more nuanced understanding of contemporary urban Indian femininity(ies) as per the mainstream media. In acknowledging these nuances, one is able to establish that the boundaries of postfeminist manifestations shift in different contexts, thereby demonstrating the problem in assuming that western manifestations of the same are uniformly applicable throughout the world. Furthermore, being cognizant of this point is crucial when considering the need to decentre the west from academic intervention. While original conceptions of postfeminism were a response to specific observations, these conceptions need not be stagnant in understanding. Recognising this allows one to properly

recognise different versions of womanhood without dismissive notions of rankings and benchmarks. This is especially important from a feminist perspective because of the ways in which nuanced understandings of the issues women face around the world allow for nuanced solutions.

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## Appendices




**Appendix 1 - Deepika Padukone at the 2018 Time 100 most influential people in the world gala in New York (Image source Satija: 2018)**



**Appendix 2 - Priyanka Chopra at the 2016 Academy Awards in Los Angeles (Image source Rathod: 2017)**



**Appendix 3 - Vidya Balan at the 2013 Cannes Film Festival in Cannes (Image source Vogue India: 2013)**




**Appendix 4 - Aishwariya Rai at the 2017 Cannes Film Festival in Cannes (Image source IndiaToday: 2017)**



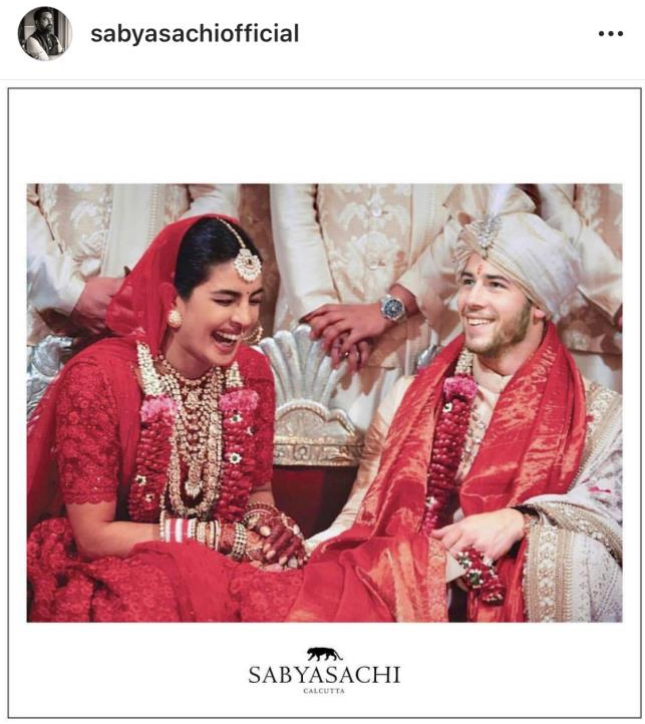

**Appendix – 5 Padukone's wedding announcment (Image source deepikapadukone Instagram 2018)**



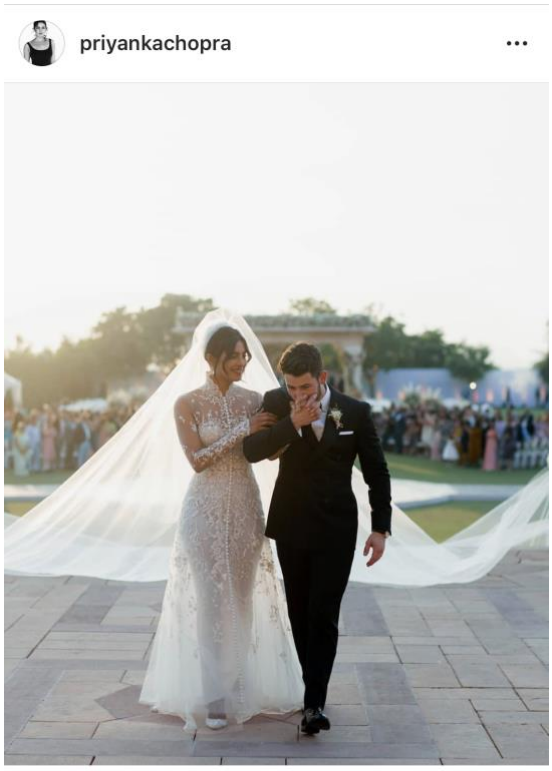

**Appendix – 6 Padukone's Konkani wedding saree (Image source deepikapadukone Instagram 2018)**




**Appendix 7 - Padukone's Sindhi wedding lehenga (Image source deepikapadukone Instagram 2018)**




**Appendix 8 - Chopra's Hindu wedding lehenga (Image source sabyasachiofficial Instagram 2018)**




**Appendix 9 - Chopra's Christian wedding dress (Image source priyankachopra Instagram 2018)**




**Appendix 10 - Chopra's family wedding reception (Image source falgunishanepeacock Instagram 2018)**




**Appendix 11 - Chopra's media wedding reception (Image source priyankachopra Instagram 2018)**




**Appendix 12 - Chopra's Bollywood wedding reception (Image source abujanisandeepkhosla Instagram 2018)**




**Appendix 13 - Padukone's family wedding reception (Image source deepikapadukone Instagram 2018)**




**Appendix 14 - Padukone's media wedding reception (Image source deepikapadukone Instagram 2018)**




**Appendix 15 - Padukone's Bollywood wedding reception (Image source deepikapadukone Instagram 2018)**