

# Escaping from Women's Marginalization in Hollywood Film Industry in T.J. Reid's "*The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo*"

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## Abstract

In the journey of the feminist movement, many efforts have been made to save marginalized women from patriarchy. Betty Friedan, an American feminist writer, reveals the controversial phenomenon of the concept of feminine mystique which restrains women from seeking their true selves due to oppression from various parties. In its practice, this phenomenon occurs in the Hollywood film industry, which is supposed to be an industry uncontaminated by gender discrimination. This study aims to investigate the issue of women's marginalization in Taylor Jenkins Reid's *The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo* by implementing Betty Friedan's theory of feminine mystique. Valid data were collected through qualitative research methods by quoting narrations and dialogues from the characters in the novel. Furthermore, the data is processed and analyzed based on the theory used. This study presents the forms of Evelyn's marginalization in three areas: domestic, Hollywood film industry, and public and media. In the end, Evelyn Hugo's rejection of gender oppression in those three areas makes her able to escape from women's marginalization and become a successful female icon in the Hollywood film industry.

## Abstrak

### Melawan Marginalisasi Perempuan di Industri Hollywood di Novel *The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo* Karya T. J. Reid

Dalam perjalanan gerakan feminis, banyak upaya yang dilakukan demi menyelamatkan perempuan yang termarginalisasi oleh patriarki. Betty Friedan, seorang aktivis dan feminis dan penulis asal Amerika, mengungkap fenomena kontroversial mengenai konsep mistik feminin yang menahan perempuan untuk mencari jati dirinya akibat penindasan dari berbagai pihak. Betty Friedan, seorang aktivis dan feminis dan penulis asal Amerika, mengungkap fenomena kontroversial mengenai konsep mistik feminin yang menahan perempuan untuk mencari jati dirinya akibat penindasan dari berbagai pihak. Dalam praktiknya, fenomena ini terjadi di industri film Hollywood, yang seharusnya menjadi industri yang tak terkontaminasi oleh diskriminasi gender. Studi ini bertujuan untuk menyelidiki isu marginalisasi perempuan dalam novel *The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo* (2017) karya Taylor Jenkins Reid dengan mengimplementasikan teori feminin mistik dari Betty Friedan. Data yang valid dikumpulkan melalui metode penelitian kualitatif dengan mengutip narasi dan dialog para tokoh dalam novel. Selanjutnya, data diolah dan dianalisis dengan mengacu pada teori yang digunakan. Penelitian ini menyajikan bentuk-bentuk marginalisasi perempuan yang dialami oleh Evelyn Hugo di tiga area: domestik, industri film Hollywood, dan publik dan media. Pada akhirnya, penolakan Evelyn Hugo terhadap opresi gender di tiga area tersebut membuatnya mampu membebaskan diri dari marginalisasi perempuan serta menjadi ikon wanita di industri Hollywood.

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## 1 Introduction

Living in a world ruled by a patriarchal system is difficult, even for women who participate in the film industry. On the other hand, most people think that Hollywood is a perfect industry for making money. Hollywood may be a part of the film industry with a million privileges for actors, but it is different for actresses. The film industry often exposes how actors are treated better than actresses. Women who are considered inferior on a daily basis, end up being given similar, if not worse, treatment by working in the film industry. In the film industry, most of the policymakers and stakeholders have always been men. People tend to believe that men's ability to control the film industry is higher than women's. It was only in the 1960s that opportunities for women film producers began to open up. At the same time when the number of female film directors is increasing, they also face gender discrimination that sabotages their careers, just as always experienced by actresses (Sheehan, 2020). For instance, any provisions about budgeting, division of labor, and ideas for shooting are often underestimated simply because they are women. According to an investigation conducted in 1976 by a journalist, Karen Stabiner, the assessment given to women is collective, which means that when one woman makes a mistake, the negative impact will apply to other women as a whole. On the other hand, men do not experience the same treatment (Sheehan, 2020).

This article was specifically written to elaborate on the issue of women's marginalization that is reflected in the novel *The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo*. The area of the issue being highlighted is the Hollywood industry. Several related studies that examine how deep-rooted the culture of oppression against women in the entertainment industry are presented to support the researcher's argument. The oppression can manifest in varied forms, from limited career opportunities given to women, and stereotypes regarding work skills, to income gaps. The further explanations are as follows.

For women, it is challenging to join and get acknowledgment in the entertainment industry. A study states that it was only in the 1600s that women were officially allowed to perform arts (Amaral, et al. 2020). Formerly, they sang and took part in operas and plays to display their talents to the public. This fact is not too unpredictable, considering that in other areas such as technology and science, women's talent is rarely recognized. Looking at another case in the tech industry, it will be easier for most people to remember Gates and Zuckerberg's names, rather than Lovelace and Berezin (Amaral, et al. 2020).

There are certain stereotypes that are assigned to women, especially in the entertainment industry. From actresses to film directors, they shared the same experience of this kind of problem. In his research, Sheehan (2020) stated that the 1960s and 1970s were crucial periods for women directors. At that time, there was a major change in the studio system caused by the emergence of television, which leads to an increasingly competitive culture in Hollywood. Directors, including women directors, climb their way to get attention for their work.

Unfortunately, the film industry has long been a business that provides greater privileges to men. Considering that this industry is highly dominated by men, women directors are often underestimated. The way they work and the decisions they made are criticized, and people are often skeptical and do not believe in the results of their work. In fact, the negative judgment is too normalized to the point that there is no room left for women directors, despite the fact that there has been a significant increase in the number of women directors. Some of the great women directors were Joan Darling, Jane Wagner, Elaine May, and Joan Micklin Silver.

Discrimination in the film industry believes that naturally, women cannot go beyond men's power because they are incompetent at work methods, incapable of giving new ideas, will not gain respect, and are weak at controlling their emotions (Sheehan, 2020). Additionally, another stereotype states



that women will only make films with the theme of romance without exploring other themes because they are too emotional. Thus, women will once again be blamed if they are proven to make romance films because it means they are fulfilling the stereotype. Hence, these discriminations further weaken women who want to build a career in the film industry.

In addition to job opportunities, women who work in the entertainment industry are excluded from income determination. If compared to actors, actresses earn less money despite working as much. This was proven in a study entitled *Age, Gender, and Compensation: A Study of Hollywood Movie Stars* that tests whether the difference in income between men and women in the entertainment industry was caused by gender discrimination and finds other contributing factors. The study argues that up to the age of 51, actors can still increase their market prices, even stable afterward. On the contrary, women only reach their highest market price at age 34 and decline afterward (De Pater et al., 2014).

The main reason causing the gap in income between men and women in the entertainment industry is age. When it comes to aging, the standards established for men and women are very different. Women are believed to mature more quickly and their skin wrinkles faster than men (Kite et al., 1991, as cited in De Pater et al., 2014). Criticism given to older women is destructive, rather than helpful.

Other than the issue of aging, the wage difference also has a strong relationship with physical appearance. Indeed, the entertainment industry requires actors and actresses to present an attractive physique as their capital to attract public attention. However, once again, the standard of physical appearance applied for men and women is different (De Pater et al., 2014). For men, it is not a big problem to get wrinkles and become older, because it means they are more mature and experienced. On the contrary, women are expected to always look young, cheerful, and without any wrinkles. If not, they will be considered less beautiful by the public.

In spite of the promising opportunity given, participating in the Hollywood industry has its flaws. This issue is reflected in *The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo* by Taylor Jenkins Reid, a romantic historical fiction published in 2017 following the life of Evelyn Hugo, a 1960s Hollywood Star. Although Evelyn is talented, she remains neglected and oppressed by many parties. However, she refuses to bow to patriarchal culture and is willing to do anything to achieve her dreams. As people's awareness of women's marginalization issue is increasing, this novel is interesting to be analyzed.

Regarding the literature review, the researcher includes a previous study and three related studies that elaborate on the issue of women's marginalization. There are four studies presented. The first one is a previous study using the same object, *The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo* novel, written by Suharni (2021). She presents two main findings; the first one is how Evelyn wants to fulfill society's expectations of her by creating a new identity to have a great career as an actress, and the second finding explains how Evelyn defends her reputation by hiding her sexuality by getting married to seven different men, which is the main issue in *The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo*. Another study by Kayani et al. (2020) used the same theory as the present study, which is the feminine mystique theory by Betty Friedan, to find out the capability of women to reject the feminine stereotype created by society. They found that Nadia, as a woman in Pakistan, does not want to be controlled by the patriarchal world around her, and shows it through some of her behaviors. Similarly, the issue of women's marginalization in the domestic area is shown in *Pride and Prejudice* novel by Jane Austen. Suaidi (2016) explains that some of the women's roles are abandoned in the novel. He also shows that most women in the novel are often put in a weak position, be it in society, inheritance, or marriage. Finally, the last study by Desmawati (2018) reviews *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott to observe the types of feminism present in the novel. In her study, Desmawati used the sentences



and dialogues of the characters to divide it into four types of feminism: Liberal Feminism, Marxist Feminism, Existentialist Feminism, and Radical Feminism (see Nabila & Noviana, 2021)

This research attempts to examine the portrayal of women's marginalization experienced by Evelyn Hugo, as well as how she opposes the marginalization. The researcher uses the feminine mystique theory initiated by Betty Friedan in 1963, which argues that women often suffer from the beliefs constructed by society that women can only get happiness by getting married and taking care of their husbands and children (Friedan, 2013). Women are also identified by their physical bodies, and there is hardly any appreciation of their ideas. Unfortunately, these values are so embodied in society that women are trapped in a position where they cannot voice their thoughts or defend themselves.

The significance of this research relies on the way it enriches the literature review for feminist study. The researcher is interested in the marginalization that keeps happening to women in the entertainment industry, even until the present. In conducting this research, the researcher also notices how the public gained more awareness of women's issues than it did in the past. If in the past women who were marginalized tended to be silent and neglected, now this issue is starting to receive more attention, both from society and scholars in women's protection institutions. Furthermore, women's marginalization may not be a new topic for feminist study, but this research will give new perspectives to other researchers that interested in analyzing the same object.

## 2 Methods

This article applied a qualitative method to analyze the data. According to Creswell (2018), qualitative research uses more than one data source, such as interviews, documents, and observations. Additionally, Creswell stated that qualitative research analysis methods are generally inductive, where users consider the correlation between data and other data sources (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Both of these aspects align with this research since it utilizes not only a novel but also several types of data sources, such as *The Feminine Mystique* by Betty Friedan as the theory book, some previous and related studies, and journal articles.

The main focus of this research is to examine Evelyn Hugo, who was a successful Hollywood actress in the 1950s being marginalized because of her gender. Based on the time setting used in the novel, if reflected on real-life issues, this is also in line with the second wave of feminism. Considering those two factors, namely the issue and period, the researcher decided to investigate the phenomenon of women's marginalization in *The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo* through a feminist perspective initiated by Betty Friedan, the feminine mystique theory. Betty Friedan shows an interest in numerous phenomena around her which reflects that most women who are married and have families do not feel satisfied. This is contrary to the view of society that so far believes that a woman's main goal in life is to remain in the domestic environment and build a family, rather than pursue a career. Align with the theory of feminine mystique which tries to challenge traditional stereotypes against women, the researcher aspires to portray the forms of discrimination from the Hollywood industry experienced by Evelyn and her rejection of this issue.

Two types of data sources are used in this article, along with some steps followed by the researcher. The primary data comes from *The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo* by Taylor Jenkins Reid as the research object. The researcher quotes the narrations in the text, which consists of sentences and dialogues by the characters in the novel. Evelyn Hugo as the main character will be examined closely to review her behavior and point of view which shows how she experiences oppression in the Hollywood industry and how she managed to reject it. Several other characters are also being reviewed, such as the journalist who interviewed Evelyn Hugo, Monique Grant; press media in the United States such as the *New York Tribune*, *thespill.com*, *Sub Rosa*, *Photomoment*,



Hollywood Digest, and Now This; the men who had married Evelyn, such as Don Adler, Harry Cameron, Max Girard, Mick Riva, and Rex North; and Evelyn's co-workers, such as Celia St. James and Ruby.

Furthermore, secondary sources such as books, journals, and online sources will support the argument in this research. As the researcher applied the theory of feminine mystique, *The Feminine Mystique* book written by Betty Friedan is used as the main reference in analyzing the issue of women's marginalization. Additionally, the selected journal articles contain discussions on issues about feminism and women's oppression. Finally, the researcher collects online sources in the form of proceeding research and theses as a literature review to enrich the researcher's knowledge regarding current research issues.

Regarding the scope of research, this article limits the area by only covering the marginalization of women that occurs in the film industry, specifically Hollywood. The researcher notices how the novel discusses Evelyn Hugo's capability to maintain her career, especially in the 1950s when patriarchal behavior was strongly inherited in society. Hence, even though the novel mentioned the minor topic of Evelyn's sexual orientation, the researcher only focuses on investigating the major issue of Evelyn's experience as an oppressed woman working in the Hollywood film industry.

After collecting the data, it will be analyzed qualitatively to answer the two problem statements mentioned in the introduction section. To answer the first problem statement, the researcher uses the concept of feminine mystique presented by Betty Friedan by dividing it into three categories; in the domestic area, Hollywood industry, and in media. The three areas show the extent to which women marginalization happened. A series of actions performed by Evelyn indicates how she did not remain silent but was willing to fight the marginalization, which will also be elaborated on. Similarly, Betty Friedan stated that along with its development, feminist groups have started a movement to deal with the increasing forms of oppression against women. Thus, the second focus is to review the narratives and dialogues of Evelyn, several of her husbands, and colleagues who participated in helping Evelyn to encounter the issues.

### **3 Results and Discussion**

#### **3.1 Evelyn Hugo as the Marginalized Woman**

As the continuation of data collection, the researcher examines it by using descriptive qualitative analysis methods based on the concept of feminine mystique by Betty Friedan. The main problems to be reviewed are: 1) finding out how *The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo* novel describes forms of marginalization of women perpetrated by male and female characters against Evelyn, and 2) investigating Evelyn Hugo's forms of rejection towards the discrimination.

This article argues that women's marginalization in the novel occurs in three areas, which are the domestic area, the Hollywood industry, and the media and public. All of them can be reviewed through Friedan's perspective of feminine mystique. The explanations are as follows.

##### **3.1.1 Women's Marginalization in Domestic Sphere**

Surprisingly, the most vulnerable environment for women is the domestic sphere. It is mentioned by Betty Friedan in *The Feminine Mystique*, that there is a generational belief about how truly feminine women do not want anything beyond their nature. In other words, they are different from feminists who fight for the right to freedom, career, education, and political participation (Friedan, 2013). This perspective harms women who want to get out of their domestic cage to seek a bigger purpose in life. The first excerpt is presented to begin the analysis.



*When I was fourteen years old, my mother had already died, and I was living with my father. The older I got, the more I realized that it was only a matter of time until my father tried to marry me off to a friend of his or his boss, someone who could help his situation. And if I'm being honest, the more I developed, the less secure I was in the idea that my father might not try to take something of me for himself. (Reid, 2017, p. 34)*

The excerpt shows a narrative spoken by Evelyn Hugo during an interview with Monique Grant, a journalist from Vivian. She reminisces about her childhood, long before she has the opportunity to be a part of the Hollywood industry. The story includes Evelyn's father as the main figure perpetuating his marginalization of her. It can be said that Evelyn Hugo is a real manifestation of a marginalized woman trapped in the domestic environment. Since childhood, she lived with her parents in Hell's Kitchen, a small neighborhood on the West Side of Midtown Manhattan in New York City. Unfortunately, her mother died when Evelyn was 14 years old because of her illness, leaving Evelyn to live alone with her father. Evelyn began to absorb the reality where she felt more unsafe living with her own father. This is ironic, considering her father was supposed to be a reliable figure. However, it was not the case for Evelyn, who actually believes that soon her father will endanger his child for his own sake. It is in line with Friedan's argument about the feminine mystique haunting women who try to escape the domestic trap.

As time goes, Evelyn's condition was getting worse since her mother died. Before turning thirteen, she had attracted the attention of others with her beauty. It is proven by the behavior of the people who live around the neighborhood. For instance, there are grown men who overtly look at her, as well as girls her age who no longer want to be Evelyn's friends.

*By the time I was thirteen, I was five foot eight, with dark, shiny brown hair, long legs, light bronze skin, and a chest that pulled at the buttons of my dresses. Grown men were watching me walk down the street, and some of the girls in my building didn't want to hang out with me anymore. It was a lonely business. Motherless, with an abusive father, no friends, and a sexuality in my body that my mind wasn't ready for. (Reid, 2017, p. 43)*

Evelyn expresses her feeling of being in an environment that constantly objectified her, leading to having no friends and living with an abusive father which end up making her depressed and lonely. Furthermore, it represents the possibility of marginalization caused by internal parties like family and external parties. Even so, there is no zero chance of women also taking part in this issue.

In short, Evelyn had the opportunity to get out of Hell's Kitchen and get closer to Hollywood by marrying Ernie Diaz in 1953. However, her suffering as a woman did not stop after becoming a man's wife. First, she thought that marrying Ernie would at least release her burden as a woman. Turns out, she was even more reminded of her father when Ernie treated her merely as an object who had to stay at home and obey him. Ernie did not physically abuse Evelyn in any way, but the way he does not believe in her dream makes her feel hurt.

*I know what it feels like to not want your father to look at you too closely, lest he decides he hates you and hits you or decides he loves you a little too much. And I know what it feels like to see your future ahead of you—the husband who's really just a new version of your father, surrendering to him in bed when it's the last thing you want to do, making only biscuits and canned corn for dinner because you don't have money for meat. (Reid, 2017, p. 52)*

That story resembles the real situation in American culture during the 1950s and 1960s, which has been discussed by Betty Friedan. She found that even after fifteen years after World War II, women in that period have a strong belief in marriage as their self-fulfillment. However, deep inside,

those women know something does not feel right about quitting school to get married. Still, they cannot exactly address the name of the problem, they just know the strange feeling in their heart.

### 3.1.2 Women's Marginalization in Hollywood Film Industry

The main setting of *The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo* circles around the Hollywood industry, thus the article includes an analysis of the forms of oppression against women that occur in that area. The narration is taken from the point of view of some male and female characters, and even Evelyn herself, to support the argument. Those narrations display how the Hollywood industry, in fact, is not a really safe place for a woman to grow their career.

After divorcing Ernie Diaz, Evelyn married a Hollywood actor named Don Adler in March 1957. He came from a wealthy and prominent family. Two months after the marriage, Don started to physically abuse Evelyn. The situation is getting worse with how Evelyn's name is rising, while Don Adler's popularity is crumbling. It made Don unsatisfied, not to mention there were speculations from the media and the public about how bad their marriage was because they do not have children. During the shooting of the film they starred in together, Don said that this film had to be Evelyn's last job so she could focus on having children and taking care of their family. Don strongly stated that they are not on the same level in the first place (Reid, 2017). Disagreeing with the forced decision, Evelyn had to encounter yet another assault from her husband. Sadly, it was difficult for Evelyn to leave Don because their marriage was initially based on their love for each other, not just a business agreement.

Reviewing the situation experienced by Evelyn reminds the researcher of one of the many interviews conducted by Betty Friedan. The interviewee is a woman working at a television station who is forced to quit her job to satisfy her husband's demands. Her husband complains that a wife who works is a woman who is too competitive, not feminine, and brings misfortune to the husband's career. This is what Friedan later calls the "career woman's guilt syndrome." (Friedan, 2013, p. 369).

Surprisingly, the women in the Hollywood industry contribute to the marginalization of Evelyn. Evelyn had a poor relationship with Celia St. James because they were competing for a good role in *Little Women*. Over time, they began to get along, despite the fact that the two of them used each other to increase their popularity in Hollywood. Celia, through the dialogue below, admits that Evelyn is a charismatic woman. From her point of view, Evelyn is gorgeous with a big chest and beautiful lips. She even said how Evelyn was able to make people amazed and wanted to undress her.

*"You stop. You know damn well what you are. How you affect the people around you. I'd kill for a chest like that and full lips like yours. You make people think of undressing you just by showing up in a room fully clothed."* (Reid, 2017, p. 108)

Supposedly, the dialogue spoken by Celia St. James appears like a compliment. It is difficult to believe that there is someone who does not like to be praised as a beautiful woman. However, that kind of compliment promotes the idea of seeing women as mere objects. It is confirmed by Friedan who observed a popular women's magazine in America during the 1960s, *McCall's* magazine. There are many anomalies in it, which portrayed women as young, energetic, feminine, and passive figures (Friedan 2013, 26). These women are so attached to the stereotype that the ultimate goal in their life is to be liked by men and to have sex. In other words, Celia St. James's statement can be even more harmful because she comes from a marginalized group of women themselves.

During her career, Evelyn has encountered some patchy roads. Right after divorcing Don Adler because of physical violence and extramarital affairs, Evelyn's name as an actress dropped. Her ex-husband bribed film producers not to work with Evelyn. Luckily, Harry Cameron, who was a successful film producer in the 1950s as well as her best friend, helped Evelyn to reclaim her reputation.



However, Evelyn realized that most of the film producers and directors she knew in Hollywood saw it as a mere favor for Harry, as shown in an excerpt from the novel, "Some of the producers and directors I met with knew who I was. Some of them were clearly seeing me just as a favor to Harry" (Reid, 2017, p. 156). Once again, it proves the struggles of a talented woman like Evelyn to escape the shadow of men. Even though Harry did not take any actions that harmed Evelyn, he had the privilege of being in the group of stakeholders in Hollywood. Friedan argues that women have never been considered subjects, but only as objects dependent on men. Evelyn is a real demonstration, where the film directors helped her because Harry asked them, not because they saw Evelyn as an actress who deserved to give credit.

### 3.1.3 Women's Marginalization by Public and Media

One's commitment to be a public figure comes with its consequences. As an actress in Hollywood, they will always be in the public spotlight, especially in the print media. It is similar to Evelyn's experience in the 1950s. Her achievements cannot be ignored by the public, especially with so many controversies happening. Therefore, an analysis that focuses on looking at the marginalization of women perpetuated by media groups and the public is provided.

Starting with the first analysis, there is an excerpt from the novel consisting of a column released by a media called *thespill.com*. The media discussed Evelyn's next plan of holding a gown auction. However, the focus shifted to the rumor about Evelyn's private interview session. *Thespill.com* commented, saying that Evelyn should talk about her seven husbands. Furthermore, they brought up Evelyn's beauty in the past when she was still a Hollywood actress. With such a beauty that is second to none, *thespill.com* says, anyone will be stunned by her beautiful body.

*Word on the street is siren/LIVING LEGEND/world's most beautiful blonde Evelyn Hugo is auctioning off gowns and agreeing to an interview, which she has not done in multiple decades. PLEASE tell me she is finally ready to talk about all those damn husbands. (I can understand four, maybe even five, six if you are really pushing it, but seven? Seven husbands? Not to mention the fact that we all know she was having an affair with Congressman Jack Easton in the early '80s. Girl. Got. A. Round.) (Reid, 2017, p. 10)*

There is a similarity between the narrative in *The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo* above and Betty Friedan's observations of McCall's magazine in the 1950s. In that period, the portrayal of women was dominated by their body, beauty, relationship with men, behavior in the domestic environment, and the way they took care of their families (Friedan, 2013). Evelyn is a gifted actress, besides her undoubted elegance. Unfortunately, the fact that Evelyn is a talented figure who is able to maintain her throne in the Hollywood industry cannot beat the media and the public, who are only curious about her love life.

However, despite the fact that the American media was so obsessed with Evelyn, some of the public do not care about her. They said that people with lots of gossip, like Evelyn, do not deserve to be talked about. For instance, the narration below is a comment from one of *thespill.com*'s readers who responds to the news about Evelyn arranging an interview session. The person who commented in such a negative manner by calling Evelyn a slut.

*I do not care about Evelyn Hugo AT ALL. STOP WRITING ABOUT THESE PEOPLE. Her marriages, affairs, and most of her movies just go to prove one thing: Slut. Three A.M. was a disgrace to women. Focus your attention on people that deserve it. (Reid, 2017, p. 11)*

That stigma was formed because the public decided only to discuss Evelyn's scandals, which were mainly supported by the presence of the media. In fact, this phenomenon often happened to



women, who are categorized into good and bad women (Friedan, 2013). According to the public, good women are feminine and stay in their lane. On the contrary, Evelyn is classified as a bad woman because she has a career in the Hollywood industry and often appears in gossip media.

Returning to the novel's premise, the story introduces Monique Grant, a journalist from Vivian chosen by Evelyn to write her biography. Initially, Evelyn did not specifically mention her reasons for picking Monique, as well as what facts she wanted to expose to the media. It confused Monique, leading her to the assumption that Evelyn wanted to tell about her past and refer to it as a "sin." Felt offended, Evelyn rejects Monique's accusation because she did not feel about committing a sin that harmed other people throughout her career.

*"OK, if I understand you correctly, what you're saying is that you'd like to confess your various sins—"*

*Evelyn's posture, which until this point has shown her to be very relaxed and fairly detached, changes. She is now leaning toward me. "I never said anything about confessing sins. I said nothing about sins at all." (Reid, 2017, p. 22)*

The conversation between Evelyn and Monique supports Betty Friedan's theory about the good and bad images of women which is still relevant today. Monique, only relying on information she gets from the internet and old news, judges and assumes that Evelyn's intention was to confess her sin. In fact, Evelyn denies that her effort to be a great actress was a sin. In other words, Monique categorizes Evelyn as a devil woman, which according to Friedan is a speculation made by the public about those women who are too focused on their careers so they do not have the ability to take care of their husbands and children (Friedan, 2013).

### **3.2 Evelyn Hugo's Rejection Towards Women's Marginalization**

Being one of the marginalized women, Evelyn Hugo had to face much oppression while working in the Hollywood industry. However, she shows efforts to get out of the gender discrimination. The researcher notices that there are two categories of rejection executed by Evelyn Hugo. First, she uses help from external parties, such as marriage and fame, to benefit her. In addition, her talent also advantages Evelyn to climb to a higher career level. The analysis is as follows.

#### **3.2.1 Evelyn's Rejection Towards Women's Marginalization Using External Parties**

Evelyn's journey before becoming an icon in Hollywood began with living in Hell's Kitchen with her father and mother. From a very young age, Evelyn always knew about her mother's ultimate dream to be an actress instead of stuck in a home with an abusive husband. That dream eventually turns into Evelyn's dream, as it becomes her initial motivation to be a Hollywood star.

Even before jumping right into Hollywood, Evelyn understands that there are sacrifices that must be made to achieve her dreams. In Evelyn's case, she victimizes herself to get what she wants. She has no interest in having sex with anyone, but unfortunately, that is the only way to get out of Hell's Kitchen. In her perspective, sex is a trade tool to take her anywhere.

*I didn't need boys in order to feel good. And that realization gave me great power. So I wasn't interested in anyone sexually. But I did want something. I wanted to get far away from Hell's Kitchen. I wanted out of my apartment, away from my father's stale tequila breath and heavy hand. (Reid, 2017, p. 44)*

Evelyn's way of using sex to escape the domestic trap is aligning with what Betty Friedan stated in the theory of feminine mystique. In her argument, women have been perceived as a passive group with no important role in this world. They only have men as protection to survive. On the other hand,



it could be said that Evelyn's strategy is a smart move. Sex, which is seen as a symbol of weakness, in the end, benefits Evelyn.

Always being given inappropriate treatment by her father, it led Evelyn to have a dream of a safe and peaceful home. She wanted to live in a place that could give her comfort with abundant wealth. Her wish is conveyed in the novel excerpt below.

*I wanted someone to take care of me. I wanted a nice house and money. I wanted to run, far away from my life. I wanted to go where my mom had promised me we'd end up someday. (Reid, 2017, p. 44)*

In *The Feminine Mystique* book, Betty Friedan writes a situation similar to the inner conflict felt by Evelyn. While conducting research on the level of participation of women in the labor field, many interesting facts were found. Most women who have careers are no longer young and are already married. They work to support the family's economy, one of which is so that their husbands can study at educational institutions.

Scientists are disappointed over the fact that America does not utilize the intelligence of women there. For instance, there is a woman who rejected a natural sciences scholarship from Johns Hopkins to work in real estate solely because she thinks that this is what American women should be, which are to marry, have children, and live in a nice house in the suburbs (Friedan, 2013). The woman's statement is similar to Evelyn's words in the excerpt above.

Unfortunately, even marriage did not bring a significant development in Evelyn's life. Ernie Diaz, her husband, is only able to provide a house and a modest living. He did not abuse Evelyn like her father did back in Hell's Kitchen, but the support he gave to Evelyn's dream of becoming a Hollywood star seemed to not exist.

Evelyn kept looking for another way to be an actress, starting with taking acting classes. At that time, she worked as a waitress in the cafeteria and was able to make as much money as Ernie. Even so, she still asks her husband's permission first so as to not show a high ego. She brings up the discussion over dinner, after serving a delectable menu while still wearing her apron to give Ernie the impression of being a submissive wife.

*I'd made him arroz con pollo that night, and I specifically didn't take my apron off when I brought it up. I wanted him to see me as harmless and domestic. I thought I'd get further if I didn't threaten him. It grated on my nerves to have to ask him how I could spend my own money. But I didn't see another choice. (Reid, 2017, p. 47)*

From the excerpt above, it can be said that Evelyn uses women's weaknesses as a weapon to empower herself. If she was seen as a non-dominant woman, then her request would be granted. Fortunately, Ernie finally allows Evelyn to join acting classes. Actually, Evelyn is not pleased in any way, because she should not have asked her husband first about how she could use her own salary.

To put it simply, the marriage that was formerly expected to be an escape ends up making her no happier than she was before marriage. Similarly, Friedan discovers that when the 'problem that has no name' hits, many women go to a psychiatrist. Surprisingly, most of the psychiatrists she interviewed admitted that unmarried women were happier than married women (Friedan 2013, 25).

### 3.2.2 Evelyn Hugo's Rejection Using Talent

The initial premise of *The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo* is the story life of Evelyn Hugo a great Hollywood actress from the 1950s. The readers can follow Evelyn's ups and downs in the entertainment world, from only being a girl in Hell's Kitchen to becoming the most powerful woman



in the Hollywood film industry. Thus, Evelyn is able to position herself in the midst of Hollywood's rough competition, proved by how well-preserved her seat as an actress until the age of 79. In the novel, Taylor Jenkins Reid depicts the glory of Evelyn Hugo with narratives written through the perspectives of several characters, not just Evelyn.

In the first excerpt below Evelyn realizes her privilege as a gorgeous woman. Since the age of fourteen, she has already looking for ways to utilize her physical appearance. Although not necessarily a talent, beauty can be an 'asset' as a transaction tool to get something you want.

*"I was gorgeous, even at fourteen. Oh, I know the whole world prefers a woman who doesn't know her power, but I'm sick of all that. I turned heads. Now, I take no pride in this. I didn't make my own face. I didn't give myself this body. But I'm also not going to sit here and say, 'Aw, shucks. People really thought I was pretty?' like some kind of prig. (Reid, 2017, p. 35)*

When she should have been playing and studying with friends at fourteen, Evelyn was shunned because she was considered beautiful. Relevant to this issue, Friedan interviewed a group of high school teenagers. Those teenagers seem to be talented, but they quit their education and choose to fulfill their feminine obligations by polishing themselves to become popular among their peers and men (Friedan, 2013). This theory was depicted by Evelyn, as written in the excerpt above. However, unlike the teenagers interviewed by Betty Friedan, Evelyn did not lose her identity and had the specific intention of becoming a Hollywood actress.

During her career, Evelyn encountered various times when she was faced with risky situations. After leaving Sunset's agency, she approached a film director named Max Girard. It only takes two weeks for Evelyn to get offered to play in the film *Boute-en-Train*. During this time, Evelyn felt freer to explore her talents compared to when she was still under Sunset's agency.

*Two weeks later, I was back on a film set. And this time, I was free of all the buttoned-up, innocent-girl stuff that Sunset had pinned on me. This time, I was able to do whatever I wanted. (Reid, 2017, p. 159)*

Evelyn's transformation from being trapped to being more relieved in expressing herself is one of the main missions fought for by feminist groups. As stated by Friedan, women need a long time to prove that they are more than just passive beings, mindless and unable to deliver opinions. These attempts to prove themselves must be passed first before they can be considered equally human to men (Friedan, 2013).

The *Boute-en-Train* film is successful in Europe because of Evelyn's proficient acting. This news is certainly the media's favorite, one of which is Photomoment. The excerpt below shows a column in the novel published by Photomoment to honor the sales success of Evelyn's newest film. However, the researcher notices something odd about this column. Instead of being called by her own name, Evelyn is still associated with her ex-husband, Don Adler. The media equates Evelyn with a commodity, which degrades her as a woman because she is perceived as an item.

*The former Mrs. Don Adler has proven to be a very hot commodity these days. Her appearance in French director Max Girard's newest film, *Boute-en-Train*, has spent the summer selling out movie houses all over Europe, and now it's taking the good ol' US of A by storm. (Reid, 2017, p. 161)*

When Evelyn married Don Adler, she was stigmatized as an irresponsible wife who could not give a child to her husband. It was quite a struggle for Evelyn to escape that toxic relationship. During those times, she seemed to have lost her way because she had to reinvent herself as an actress, not as an 'actor's wife.' Friedan also discussed this, arguing that when society only expects women to meet

domestic expectations, it will take time to seek a new identity (Friedan, 2013). Careful future plans need to be arranged to get out of the prison of femininity.

To this point, the excerpts above represent how Evelyn is both a gifted actress and a brave woman with the courage to reject gender oppression. The oppression occurred within three scopes, which are the domestic area, the Hollywood film industry, and the public and media. Marriage and talent as the main strategy to fight the oppression allow Evelyn to escape from women's marginalization in the Hollywood film industry.

#### 4 Conclusion

Referring to the findings in chapter four, *The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo* displays the issue of women's marginalization that occurred in the Hollywood film industry in the 1950s. Collecting and dividing the valid data leads the researcher to some conclusions. In total, 9 excerpts are presented to reflect the forms of women's oppression. The researcher divides all the excerpts into three categories based on where they occur. Respectively 3 excerpts cover the domestic sphere, the Hollywood film industry, and the media and the public. Evelyn Hugo, as the main character, receives unfair treatment in those three areas. The background of this marginalization is arguably due to gender factors. Being a woman gave Evelyn many disadvantages as a Hollywood actress.

Furthermore, the researcher observes that Evelyn Hugo is not a character who surrenders to the marginalization she experiences. Various attempts were made involving support from external parties and oneself, shown through 3 excerpts respectively. The help from external parties meant that Evelyn used marriage as a shield to increase her popularity in the entertainment industry. According to her, being under the shadow of men gives its own advantages. On the other hand, Evelyn was gifted with an attractive physique and top-notch acting talent. That is why even though she received such a negative perception many times, she managed to survive the Hollywood film industry. In fact, her prowess was also recognized by those around her.

Based on these findings, the researcher concludes that Evelyn Hugo had gone through a major transition from childhood to becoming a legendary Hollywood actress. As a child, she was the real manifestation of a woman who was confined to the domestic realm by living with her father. It was only during her teens to adulthood that Evelyn underwent a development era in her career as an actress. In the end, she succeeded in proving that as a woman, she was the one who thrives in the adventure of finding identity without having to surrender to the obligations of femininity as a woman (Friedan, 2013).

Finally, the researcher hopes that the reader can gain a new point of view on the marginalization of women through this research, as well as other researchers who plan to conduct similar studies in the future. The researcher offers several recommendations that can be used as references for further research. For instance, instead of focusing on seeing how the marginalization of women occurs in the Hollywood film industry, the domestic sphere can be used as one point of view. Finally, it should be noted that the analysis of *The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo* can also be focused on the sexual orientation issue, not only domination over women.

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