

# Gender Culture in British and American Youth Cinema: Women's Resistance and Compromise during the Gender Equality Process

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**Abstract:** *In the 1960s, as a result of the Western feminist movement, feminism gained widespread attention from all sectors of society. Feminism has been discussed in a variety of British and American youth films in recent years. They have focused on the collision and intermingling of the two sexes within the framework of a patriarchal society through this mode of expression, expressing the cultural aspiration for harmonious coexistence of the two sexes.*

**Keywords:** *feminism; male power structure; youth cinema in Britain and America; gender culture*

## 1. Introduction

The feminist movement and the awakening of women's consciousness are inextricably interwoven, and with the evolution of society and the passage of time, this cultural phenomena has gradually permeated the area of film. In recent years, feminism has been portrayed in British and American youth films as both a feminist resistance to male power and a feminist compromise, which is a natural result of the two sexes' cultural collision and convergence. British and American youth films appeal to the male society's concern for the value and dignity of women while also advocating for the peaceful coexistence of the two sexes within the framework of the masculine society[1].

## 2. "Feminism": the feminine consciousness rising in British and American adolescent film cinema

### 2.1 *Rebellion is merely the beginning*

The ultimate goal is to break free from the constraints of secularism. In the 1960s, a "feminist" flurry began in British and American juvenile films, coinciding with the "feminist" trend in Western literature and artistic philosophy. Feminism is a rebellious movement within the female community, a distinct cultural phenomenon that developed in response to the social and historical background of male domination. Even in the Western world, many women face discrimination, which is why they turned to the "feminist movement" to safeguard their rights and advance their social status. However, while this "feminist movement" had an instant effect, it provided little assistance to women. As a result, numerous films have attempted to examine the unique and delicate feelings of women from a female perspective, demonstrating their resistance against patriarchal society in order to depict women's genuine social and self-worth. This trend is most pronounced in British and American youth films. For instance, "Lady Bird", directed by American Greta Gerwig and released in September 2017, is a young family film about a high school girl who rebels against her family and attempts to break free from the world's restraints. Christine is a rebellious high school student in Sacramento, California, in the early twenty-first century. She is independent and wild, and despises her city and her mother's nagging. However, she is powerless to change the situation, and under the pressure of her mother, she is forced to take everything in quiet, putting her in grave danger[2]. Christine later meets a boy named Danny and the two fall in love since they share a similar personality and attraction. However, for a variety of circumstances, she and Danny were forced to call it quits. Faced with the pain of her relationship and the misery created by her family, Christine must navigate the difficulties of growing up on her alone, and while she cracks a lot of jokes along the way, she eventually emerges as a confident young woman.

## ***2.2 Self-dreaming as a part of the growth process***

While many women's perceptions of 'feminism' during their adolescent years may have been limited to how to present themselves and demonstrate their uniqueness, as they grow older and more experienced, the female population begins to focus more on how to earn society's respect and protect their rights. This is the point at which women truly mature, when they gain independence and attempt to find their place in a patriarchal society. Maggie is the sole female apprentice to boxing coach Frankie in the film *Million Dollar Baby*, a lady at the bottom of the social ladder with a dream of becoming a boxing champion. Due to Willie's betrayal, Frankie abandons his "safety first" policy and chooses to take his pupil Maggie into the boxing ring. However, as Maggie gained the upper hand in the fight, her opponent surprised her with a punch that pushed her to the ground, forcing Maggie to strike her head on a stool, resulting in a shattered cervical vertebra and high paralysis. Following Maggie's injuries, Frankie worked tirelessly each day at the hospital to care for her, but physicians gave her an ultimatum and forced her to amputate both legs. Maggie asked her teacher, Frankie, to assist her in ending her life, but Frankie never did. Maggie bit her tongue and attempted suicide one night, but was saved by the hospital. Frankie is determined to assist his female apprentice Maggie in obtaining her final release, despite the priest's opposition. Maggie's death in the film prompts profound reflection and broadens the audience's knowledge of life; as the film states: "As long as we strive hard for our aspirations and eventually achieve them, we should be able to declare without regret at the end of our lives: "I did the right thing!" This is what makes everyone realise how critical it is to reclaim one's faith and never give up on one's aspirations in life.

## ***2.3 Following the development of female consciousness, equal rights for men and women***

Feminism's progressive evolution has resulted in an awakening of women's consciousness. They have begun to question and oppose the social system's patriarchal order, aiming to liberate women from their submissive position, to free themselves from the constraints of a male-dominated society, and to ascribe special values to women. British and American youth films tended to recognize the spirit of female freedom and independence, as well as the complementary equal rights of men and women, guided by this ideology. For instance, in Jonathan Dayton's "Battle of the Sexes", (2017) a female tennis player, Billie, becomes unsatisfied with the fact that she is paid less than her male counterpart and launches a battle to defend her rights. Although the story took place in 1973, it is highly relevant nowadays. "The Battle of the Sexes" is a unique and thrilling film that places the struggle for women's rights in the setting of a tennis match[3]. Finally, the fight of the sexes is a battle of human natures. Men have been accustomed to preferential treatment for thousands of years, and as a result, they turn a blind eye to women's uneven treatment, and when women take up the fight against them, it endangers men's standing and rights and reveals their greedy and selfish nature. Indeed, affirmative action is not only for women; it is for everyone who wishes to be themselves. Men are not need to battle for their own needs, nor are women have to become subservient to men, but they must be able to accept and understand one another, which is the affirmative action that the film asks for.

## **3. Female consciousness's quest of value: resistance in a male-dominated social structure**

### ***3.1 Economic independence as a means of establishing women's self-worth***

In a patriarchal culture, the only way for women to achieve their self-worth is for them to have the right to independence, which encompasses economic and personal independence, and economic independence is a necessary condition for women's personal independence. Numerous films in British and American youth cinema reflect women's economic independence. For instance, the film "Begin Again" (2015) directed by John Carney.

The film follows Gretta, a singer who abandons everything to start a new life in New York City with her boyfriend, Dave, for the sake of love and music. However, once he secures a nice position, he abandons Gretta. Gretta is desperate for financial support, but she meets Dan, a music producer, in a small tavern. However, Dan, like Gretta, is a man who has lost his wife and children and is currently undergoing a life's adversities time. Gretta suddenly understands her dream of becoming a musician with the assistance of Dan and achieves financial independence without the assistance of her boyfriend. The film is romantic and inspirational, but it also chronicles Gretta's journey toward self-sufficiency and self-improvement. The video employs music to convey the significance of dreams and endows an independent woman with a liberated personality. Despite her worldly adversity and spiritual apathy,

Gretta persists in herself and pursues her aspirations, searching for a way forward in life despite the harsh realities. This self-sufficient spirit and female consciousness are worth emulating in any contemporary woman battling for life and dreams.



Figure 1 The hero and heroine sharing music together in the film "Begin Again"

### 3.2 True marital liberty

The freedom of love and marriage is another frequently explored subject in British and American youth films. In a modern culture where women's consciousness is growing, the desire of freedom in love and marriage is not only a natural outcome of social growth, but also a central expression of "feminist." By depicting women's liberal ideas on love and marriage, British and American adolescent films demonstrate a considerable concern for and rethinking of "feminist." Jenny, for example, is born into a highly traditional household in "Jenny's Wedding" (2016). Jenny and her girlfriend Katie have been dating for five years, but Jenny has been afraid to disclose their relationship to her parents due to their sexual orientation. Until Jenny is ready to go down the aisle with Kitty and she tells her parents everything. Jenny's parents and family were obviously opposed to her actions, but Jenny waged a courageous battle against her family for her own happiness. Jenny and Kitty's marriage is ultimately approved by her parents and family, and they marry. "Jenny's Wedding" is a liberating examination of marriage from a female perspective. It is an alternative romantic drama that delves deeper into the concept of "feminist" and teaches women the truth: it is preferable to be honest to oneself than to conceal it constantly[4]. If you spend your entire life attempting to conceal yourself, you will also never meet anyone else. Jenny's courage and candour not only help her parents and family understand her better, but also provide her with the love and support she requires, and, more significantly, the love and marriage she desires.

### 3.3 The advancement of women

For a long time, the corrupt belief that men are inferior to women was an unalterable status quo under the tyrannical dogma of male supremacy. As a result, a great number of "feminists" have stepped forward, expecting to elevate their position via their own resistance and efforts. Often, similar female characters are represented in British and American youth films. "Colette" (2018), for example, is a sweet, simple girl whose partner, Willy, is an accomplished and experienced writer. Willy talks Colette so much about the excellent life in Parisian high society that Colette, who is from the countryside, can't help but develop a strong desire for love and the great city, and marries Willy in Paris in a confusing manner. Colette also began writing upon her marriage, with the help and support of her husband Willy, using her own memories and experiences as a student to create her first novel, "Claudine". Willy, her husband, read and admired her work. What Colette did not anticipate was her husband publishing the work anonymously under Willy's name. Willy achieved fame and membership in Parisian society as a result of this work. Willy then coerced Colette into being his scribe for his own ego[5]. Colette, on the other hand, bluntly refuses, and in a fit of passion, Willy turns aggressive against Colette and shamelessly cheats on her. Colette develops a 'feminist perspective' as she struggles to break free from her husband's grasp and pursue her own love and independence in response to her husband's behaviour. Colette bids Willy farewell in her schoolboy navy uniform and gives her internal monologue at the film's conclusion: "Claudine and Colette are the same person; you murdered Claudine and now I am just Colette. You're not simply selfish; you made me who I am; I've matured and am now stronger than Claudine." These few brief lines convey a great deal, not just by defending a woman's dignity, but also by reflecting the mature woman's strong personal viewpoint.



Figure 2 Colette and her husband in the film "Colette"

#### 4. The process of gender equality in gender culture

##### 4.1 Women must be liberated from male dominance

While British and American youth films depict feminists fighting the patriarchal world, they are not fully feminist and are, at best, critical of male supremacy due to the market aims and audience positioning of the films. While feminists' struggle against male dominance is aimed at establishing gender equality, the 'gender equality' portrayed in British and American youth films is achieved within the framework of a patriarchal socioeconomic structure. In this regard, 'feminism' in British and American juvenile films is self-contradictory. Maggie, for example, improves as a female boxer thanks to the assistance of her male trainer Frankie in "Million Dollar Baby". When she finally makes it to the ring as a boxing champion, she is crippled for life by a devastating blow from her ruthless opponent and chooses to end her ignoble existence. Maggie's death is both a silent protest against patriarchal society and a further proof of her inability to escape its shadow. Although Gretta eventually accomplishes her musical dream and achieves financial independence in the film "Begin Again," her success is not entirely due to her own work, but also to Dan's assistance. Gretta's quest for feminine power is primarily about emancipating herself from her boyfriend Dave's financial reliance, but she is unable to reclaim her dignity and independence without the assistance of another man, Dan.



Figure 3 Maggie as a boxer in the movie "Million Dollar Baby"

##### 4.2 The Feminist Resistance

While feminists have obtained certain rights as a result of their struggle in a patriarchal society, the majority of women in the modern era are still unable to live a flawless existence in the shadow of a patriarchal culture. Even the strongest female individual can develop an element of self-denial when confronted with popular beliefs. This female psychology is also prominently depicted in British and American adolescent films. For instance, Andy is a rookie to the job in "The Devil Wears Prada". She is Miranda's assistant, the editor-in-chief of "RUNWAY" magazine, and is first "tortured" regularly by Miranda, the fashion obsessive. She amazed Miranda when she stood in front of her in a fashionable attire. Andy's career took a new direction, and she worked her way up to become the fashion magazine

RUNWAY's number one assistant. Her profession was supposed to bring her happiness, but it was not to be. While Andy's change has resulted in a successful profession, her romantic relationship is in peril. Not only does she alienate her lover, but she also alienates her friends. Andy and Miranda then relocate to Paris, France, for job purposes[6]. Simultaneously, Andy's employer Miranda's life is in disarray. Not only does her husband want to divorce her, but the organisation is preparing to fire her as a magazine editor and replace her with Jacqueline, her adversary. Miranda is willing to sacrifice her long-term relationship in order to maintain her status. Andy is taken aback by this, and she is tempted to flee the whirlwind. At the conclusion of the film, when Miranda is once again besieged by media, Andy turns around and flees, calling Andy on the phone but getting no response and throwing the phone into the pool. Miranda and Andy, the two women featured in the film, are both successful in their careers, but they are both unable of managing their love or marriage, and if they were both men, people would focus exclusively on their careers and not on their families or relationships. Andy eventually chooses to compromise and leave under the influence of popular beliefs, while Miranda, despite retaining her executive position, is constantly criticised by others. Indeed, Miranda is a subverter of masculine dominance. When she is held to male power standards, the fashion business in which she works must conform to the aesthetics and demands of male power, and to safeguard her own vested interests, she must succumb to the methods and intrigues of male power society.

### **4.3 The integration of gender cultures**

The interaction and harmony of "gender cultures" is, in fact, a fight and compromise between women's and men's rights, as well as a collision and intermingling of the two cultures. The feminine gender is not privileged in the picture. While British and American youth films cannot provide a comprehensive interpretation of "feminism" or show the compromising side of feminism while depicting the struggle for women's rights, the women's issues reflected in the films also provide space for reflection in a male-dominated society and, to a certain extent, help to change the discrimination and prejudice against women. British and American youth films show the feminism compromise in two ways: one is by portraying women as objects of desire for the male gaze. The majority of these films' female protagonists are young, gorgeous, sensual, and endearing, with a sweetheart-like appearance and a simple, gentle disposition. Gretta in "Begin Again", Colette in "Colette", and Andy in "The Devil Wears Prada" are all examples of this[7]. Another is to endow women with a 'maternal' quality and to restrict 'femininity' transgressions. In the film "Raising Helen", Helen Harris, for example, is a fashionista who aspires to be a famous model agent and live a vivid image, but is derailed by an accident involving her sister and brother-in-law. Prior to her death, her sister and brother-in-law leave behind three children, which young Helen Harris is compelled to raise. Helen Harris later met Dan Parker, a handsome young minister who was also the headmaster of the school where her sister and brother-in-law's attended. The three children are well cared for with Dan Parker's assistance, and Helen Harris and Dan Parker fall in love. Helen Harris's new life forced her to abandon the fashion industry and abandon her personal ambitions. Despite being the fashion industry's 'favourite,' Helen Harris is forced to choose between her dreams and her responsibilities in order to fulfil her role as a 'good wife and mother,' and in the end, her dreams give way to motherhood.

## **5. Conclusion**

In short, as the "feminist movement" has grown in the Western world, British and American youth films have increasingly focused on feminism, which demonstrates feminism's resistance to the patriarchal world and arouses people's respect for and understanding of women's values[8], but also reflects and advocates for feminism's compromises. On the other hand, they exemplify feminism's moderation and advocate for the peaceful coexistence of "gender cultures." Although feminism as a distinct cultural phenomenon has not been analysed due to the commodity properties of cinema, British and American youth films have significantly alleviated women's discriminatory practices in a male-dominated society through their interpretation and analysis of "feminism." Thus, feminist youth films have significant cultural and educational value.

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