



WOMEN'S DISCRIMINATION IN AMY POEHLER'S *MOXIE*: A FILM ANALYSIS

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Abstract

Discrimination is found in many places. One group in particular that is affected by oppression and discrimination is women. In response to this issue, feminism has been vocal for many years. In accordance, this research uses the feminist approach to analyze the various forms of discrimination experienced by female characters in *Moxie* and the actions taken by them to fight this inequality. This research uses a qualitative method with descriptive analysis. The data source used comes from a film by Amy Poehler, *Moxie* (2021). Data were gathered by identifying instances of discrimination and the responses of female characters through screenshots and dialogues from relevant scenes. The film was viewed multiple times, and the data related to the research topic were collected and sorted before being analyzed. The analysis was conducted through a feminist lens that emphasizes gender discrimination. The results show that discrimination experienced by female students at Rockport High School occurs in various forms, namely direct discrimination, indirect discrimination, and harassment. This leads to a perception of women as weak and overlooked, exemplified by male students creating a 'list' that undermines women, while the school did nothing to stop it. Consequently, female characters show courage in fighting discrimination through various means, such as persuasive actions, rebellion and oration. This research has implications or raising public awareness about the importance of gender equality through media.

Keywords: *Moxie, feminism, gender discrimination*

INTRODUCTION

Human beings have the same role in life. Both women and men have the right to live their lives without any coercion or prohibition. But in fact, gender inequality still occurs in social life. Evans (2017:2) discusses in her book *The Persistence of Gender Inequality*, that there is a systemic imbalance in society that grants men greater power and privilege compared to women. This imbalance leads to various disruptions, allowing men to indirectly control and dominate women. Their actions confine women, restricting their freedom to live as they choose. They are required to obey rules that benefit men. In other words, women are positioned as subordinate to men. They are often viewed as incapable of taking on leadership roles because they are seen as gentle creatures and easily influenced by emotions. In contrast, men are regarded as decisive and rational, which makes them appear more suited for leadership positions.

Gender inequality takes on many forms, one of which is discrimination. According to Shastri (2014), women's discrimination is an act of oppression by men against women because women are seen as powerless. This oppression is not only carried out by men but also by the social environment. One country where gender discrimination remains widespread is the United States. Despite being a developed nation that champions liberalism and the concept of freedom, gender discrimination continues to manifest in various institutions, including educational settings.

Literature and human life are intrinsically linked, as literature serves as a medium for conveying a wide range of human experiences and emotions through various forms, including novels, dramas, short stories, and songs. However, not all written works qualify as literature, and not all literature is confined to written text. This means that literature is not only focused on words in language but also on actions or images that represent life, as

seen in films. A film is a form of literary work that effectively conveys a narrative. Unlike other literary forms, such as novels, short stories, or poetry, which rely on the reader's imagination to visualize the setting, films offer a vivid representation of the time and place in which the story unfolds.

The film *Moxie* directed by Amy Poehler and released on March 3, 2021, is centered around the theme of discrimination against women in a school setting. Based on the novel of the same name by Jennifer Mathieu, *Moxie* explores the lives of teenagers at East Rockport High School in the United States. The writers are interested in choosing *Moxie* film as an object to analyze because there are many aspects of discrimination that are experienced by female students at the school. To examine these issues, the researcher employs a feminist approach that highlights the gender discrimination experienced by women. This research is significant because it explores gender inequality and discrimination through the analysis of the film *Moxie*, contributing to the literature potentially increasing societal awareness of gender equality issues.

Hooks (2000:viii) defines feminism as "a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression." It can be said that feminism is a movement related to the issue of gender differences, advocating equality for women and campaigning for women's right and interest. All of this is done so that women can get an equal place with men in social, political, and economic life. Feminism has various branches of types, liberal feminism, radical feminism, social or Marxist feminism, eco feminism, black feminism, and psychoanalytic feminism. One of the various types of feminism that have been mentioned, liberal feminism is a type of feminism that relates to the source of data analysis used, thus, liberal feminism is used to fight injustices such as discrimination.

Smith (2013:10) defines discrimination as a condition when a group of people is treated as if they are less inherently admirable than others. So, it can be concluded that discrimination is an act of difference or unfair actions against a person or a group who is considered different or who is under them, the person who discriminates. There are several types of discrimination, such as gender, race, age, religion, etc. The type that appears in *Moxie* is gender discrimination. Gender discrimination is an unfair treatment of individuals based on their gender. There are several types of gender discrimination (Guidance, 2019:14). First, Direct Discrimination, is an act of discrimination that is usually done intentionally and openly. Second, Indirect Discrimination is an act of discrimination that is done by someone unintentionally. Unlike direct discrimination, the perpetrator of indirect discrimination doesn't know that he is discriminating. Third, Harassment, is an inappropriate, unwanted, and disturbing act. The perpetrator intentionally harasses the victim based on the aspect such as race, gender, or body shape. There are sexual, physical, and verbal harassment where the impact of harassment causes victims to feel afraid, uncomfortable, and intimidated.

This research begins with a review of several relevant previous studies, including Natasya's (2022) study from Udayana University, which examines the expressions of feminism in *Moxie* and the factors contributing to its emergence. The findings indicate the presence of psychoanalysis, gender feminism, ecofeminism, and liberal feminism, which ecological protection as a significant factor. Jimmi and Mawadah's (2021) research from Bina Sarana Informatika University investigates the discrimination faced by the main character in *Crazy Rich Asians*, Rachel. The study identifies various forms of discrimination, including harassment and racial discrimination, which lead to her marginalization and negative impacts on her mental health. Next, Pina Pitria's (2019) study from the State Islamic University Sultan Thaha Saifuddin Jambi, analyze the discrimination experienced by Judy Hopps in *Zootopia*. The research address three questions regarding the types and impacts of discrimination, as well as Judy's efforts to combat it. The result reveals direct and indirect discrimination, harassment, and victimization, which Judy confronts by publicly speaking out and supporting other activist.

This research distinguishes itself from these studies by providing a more-in-depth analysis of the discrimination depicted in *Moxie* and the responses of the female characters, including the cinematographic aspects that have not been addressed in previous studies, thereby filling an academic gap with a comprehensive feminist approach.

METHOD

This research employs a qualitative methodology along with descriptive analysis. As noted by Bogdan and Biklen (2007:5), descriptive qualitative research relies on data represented through words or images rather than numerical values. Descriptive qualitative research evaluates data in its transcribed form as closely as possible. The analysis findings are presented in a narrative that depicts the worldview.

The data for this study consists of instances of discriminatory treatment depicted in the film *Moxie* expressed through dialogue and actions. The main source of data is the film *Moxie* directed by Amy Poehler, which was released in the United States on March 3, 2021, and has a runtime of 1 hour and 51 minutes.

To answer the 1st and 2nd research questions, namely to find out what forms of discrimination appear and to find out what resistance female characters are doing against discrimination at school in *Moxie* film, the authors use a feminist approach, which focuses on women's discriminations. A Feminist approach is used to depict women's experiences, the challenges they face, and the strategies they employ to overcome difficulties. This approach also helps to understand how the film maintains or challenges gender stereotypes and existing power structures. The researchers analyze cinematography in *Moxie* film from the beginning to understand how *Moxie* film depicts gender discrimination through its visual elements.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings and discussions are divided into two parts based on the research objectives, namely to find out what discrimination women experience in the film *Moxie* and how they fight against the discrimination. In each part, there are answers to the research objectives using a feminist approach. When analyzing a film as an object, things related to the studied object must also be considered. The findings are in the form of screenshots and supporting dialogue.

Forms of discrimination experienced by female characters portrayed in *Moxie*

Gender discrimination, as a form of gender inequality, manifests in various ways at Rockport High School, as Shastri (2014) explains that women's discrimination is an act of oppression by men against women because women are seen as powerless. The film clearly depicts three main types of discrimination: direct discrimination, indirect discrimination, and harassment, in line with the classification outlined by Guidance (2019:14).

Direct discrimination

Direct discrimination, defined as an act of discrimination that is usually done intentionally and openly (Guidance, 2019:14), is clearly seen in two main incidents:

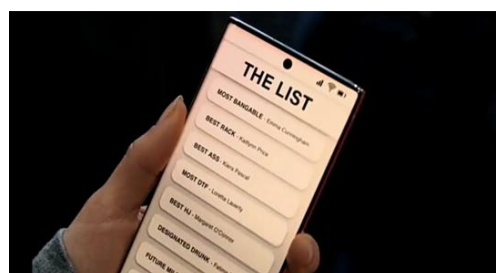


Figure 1. 'The list' shows up

Claudia: "Viv. They posted the list."

Vivian: "You know that list is pretty messed up if you think about it."

Claudia: "Yeah, duh"

(24:04)

The contents of 'the list' are shown in figure 1, such as "most bangable" for Emma, "best ass" for Kiera Pascal, "best rack" for Kaitlynn, and "most obedient" for Vivian, is posted by male students. Even other students and teachers begin to call female students by their nicknames from the list, not their real names. Vivian expresses her frustration, stating that the list is "pretty messed up." This incident directly reflects the concepts of sexual objectification and patriarchy. Within a patriarchal framework, as described by Evans (2017:2), there is a systemic imbalance in society that grants men greater power and privilege, allowing them to control and dominate women. This "list" reduces women to sexual objects, stripping them of their individuality and dignity, and asserts male dominance within the school environment. It also demonstrates how patriarchal culture normalizes demeaning behavior and creates an unsafe environment for women to express themselves.

The camera movement in the scene uses the pan technique. The camera moves from right to left to show a dramatic impression. In this scene, the camera employs the extreme close-up technique. This can be seen in the scene where there is only a hand holding a cell phone that says 'the list,' and based on the analysis that has been done, the sound that appears in this scene is a diegetic speech category. This is based on the conversation between Vivian and Claudia and the noisy of other students that can be heard by the characters and also the audience.



Figure 2. Mitchell spits in Lucy's drink (14:22)

In figure 2, Mitchell spits on Lucy's drink after she refuses his offer to buy her one. This act is intended as a warning that at Rockport High School, women are considered inferior to men and must obey them. Mitchell's actions are an explicit representation of patriarchal dominance and misogyny. They demonstrate how men use symbolic and physical violence to assert their power and punish women who do not conform to established gender norms. Mitchell's unawareness of gender issues or women's boundaries reflects a patriarchal mindset that views women's desires as trivial and dismissible.

The scene takes place when Mitchell spits on Lucy's drink. The setting is the school cafeteria, which is a place to sell food or drinks. This can be seen from the two of them standing in front of the vending machine and Mitchell spitting on the drink that Lucy had just bought. The camera movement technique used is a Steadicam type. The camera is mounted on a device to prevent shaking, and the shooting angle is taken from several sides. While the camera shot is a two-shot. It can be seen how Mitchell and Lucy are in the same frame. In addition, sound analysis was also carried out; it was found that in the scene, the types of sound that appeared were diegetic speech and non-diegetic. Diegetic

sound comes from the conversation between Lucy and Mitchell, which can be heard by the actor and the audience. While non-diegetic sound comes from the back sound of the instrument when the scene occurs and can only be heard by the audience.

Indirect discrimination

Indirect discrimination, which occurs unintentionally by perpetrators who may not realize they are discriminating (Guidance, 2019:14), is also evident in the film:



Figure 3. Bradley and Emma host the morning announcement

Bradley: "Good morning, Mermaids and Pirates."

Emma: "What does that mean?"

Bradley: "I'm being inclusive."

Emma: "What, so women can't be Pirates?"

Bradley: " 'Argh' you gonna let me get to the announcements—

Emma: "Of course. Good morning Pirates of any and all genders."

(01:11:30)

During the morning announcements, Bradley greets students with "Good morning, Mermaids and Pirates." Emma challenges this greeting, pointing out that "Mermaids" are depicted as gentle and powerless creatures, in contrast to "Pirates" who are strong and independent. This illustrates the view that female students are considered beautiful but weak. Meanwhile, in the previous school announcement, the greeting for the students was "Rockport Pirates" at minute 06:48. The use of these terms reflects deeply ingrained gender stereotypes within patriarchal culture. These stereotypes place women in an inferior position and limit their roles, aligning with feminist theories on how language and media representations can reinforce gender inequality. The school, as an institution, indirectly supports these stereotypes by allowing such greetings.

The setting for the scene above is in the classroom, because even though Emma and Bradley are delivering the announcement from a different room, the broadcast room, they appear on the TV in the classroom, so the setting is the classroom. The camera movement uses the Steadicam technique, and for the camera shot, it uses the two-shot type, where in the scene, only Emma and Bradley appear. The sound analysis is diegetic speech. This is based on the conversation between Emma and Bradley that can be heard by the characters in the film and also by the audience.



Figure 4. Lucy report about 'the list' to the principal

Lucy: "Have you seen this?"

Principal: "What is it, honey?"

Lucy: "See what they called me?"

Principal: "Oh. No, that's social media. I don't understand."

Lucy: "No, it's a list."

Principal: "Well, listen, Lucy. Sticks and stones,"

Lucy: "Are you kidding me?"

Principal: "Go and sit down. We're having a pep rally."

(25:00)

In the datum above, Lucy reports the existence of "the list" to Principal Shelly, but her report is dismissed as trivial. The principal is more concerned with the school's image than with the discrimination experienced by female students. This incident demonstrates institutional discrimination and the marginalization of women's voices. The principal, as a figure of authority, fails in her responsibility to protect female students, illustrating how institutions can indirectly reinforce gender inequality by ignoring complaints and prioritizing image over student well-being. This also aligns with the concept of gaslighting, where a victim's experiences are trivialized or denied. From the explanation above, it was found that there was indirect discrimination carried out by the school against female students.

Based on the analysis that has been done, the setting of the scene is an indoor football field. It can be seen when Lucy and the principal are talking that many people are sitting in the bleachers. In addition, it can also be seen based on their conversation where the principal mentions a 'pep rally,' where a pep rally is usually held before a school sports match.

The camera movement technique used is Steadicam, while the camera shot technique used is a medium shot. The camera is placed on a device to produce a stable image without any shaking. In the scene, the main focus is the principal and Lucy, who are talking. However, behind them, there are many other people who are doing their activities. That's why this scene is included in the medium shot type, not two shots. For the sound analysis, this scene is included in the diegetic speech, based on the sounds that appear, which are only the conversation between the principal and Lucy and the noise of other students.

Harassment

Harassment defined as inappropriate, unwanted, and disturbing acts, often intentional and based on aspects such as gender or body shape (Guidance, 2019:14).



Figure 5. A male student slaps Kiera's bottom (25:37)

Figure 5 shows a male student slaps Kiera's butt because she was nominated as the woman with the "best ass" on "the list." This act is a clear form of sexual harassment and a

manifestation of sexual objectification and rape culture that normalizes unwanted touching. It demonstrates how women's bodies are treated as objects accessible and controllable by men, which is central to the patriarchal system that normalizes sexual harassment, where women's bodies are seen as objects. Like Kiera, who got the nickname "best ass".

Based on the data above, it can be seen that the setting is an indoor football field. This can be seen from the number of students sitting in the bleachers and from the uniforms of their school football team worn by the students. The camera movement technique used is Steadicam, and the type of camera shot is a full shot because the camera focuses from head to toe. Diegetic sound is the type of sound that appears in this scene. Although there is no conversation involved, the noisy sound produced by the students makes it fall into the diegetic type because the sound can be heard by the characters in the film and the audience.



Figure 6. Jason overtakes Kaitlynn's seat

Jason: "Did you miss me?"

Kaitlynn: "Seriously?"

Jason: "Where you going?"

Kaitlynn: "Stop."

Jason: "I got a seat right here for you."

(05:49)

Figure 6 shows the situation when Jason intentionally takes Kaitlynn's seat, forcing her to sit on his lap, and says, "I got a seat right here for you." Jason considers his actions a joke, but in fact, they constitute harassment. This incident is an example of verbal and physical sexual harassment that is often trivialized. It shows how sexist behavior is normalized and considered "harmless" in the school environment, creating an unsafe space for women. The school's failure to address such actions, as implied by the narrative, reinforces the idea that institutions protect their image rather than their female students, aligning with feminist critiques of the culture of impunity.

In the scene above, it can be seen that the setting for the scene is a classroom. This can be seen from the presence of tables and chairs that students usually sit on. In addition, there is a scene where Kaitlynn is about to sit but is usurped by Jason. The camera movement technique used is Steadicam. The camera is installed in several parts using tools to get a stable image. In this scene, the scene was also taken using a camera that was set on several sides. The camera shot technique used is a medium shot, where in the scene the shooting is done slightly away from the actor so that things around the actor also enter the frame. There are 4 people and other tables and chairs that are also visible in the frame. For sound analysis, the sound used is diegetic speech. This means that the sound that appears in the scene comes from a conversation between Kaitlynn and Jason, without any additional sounds such as background sound.

The resistance female characters are doing against discrimination at school

The film *Moxie* not only depicts discrimination but also highlights various resistance strategies employed by female characters, aligning with the principles of feminism as “a movement to end sexism, sexist, exploitation, and oppression” (Hooks, 2000:viii).

Through persuasive actions



Figure 7. Vivian put zine in women's toilet (28:09)

Based on the datum, Vivian creates an indie magazine or zine containing issues of gender inequality at Rockport High School and encourages women to fight against this inequality. She anonymously places these zines in the girls' toilet. Vivian's actions fall into the persuasive type of resistance because she uses flayers. It's form of grassroots activism and empowerment through media. This reflects how individuals can use communication tools to spread awareness and mobilize others for social change. It also aligns with the concept of liberal feminism, which focuses on change through education and persuasion to achieve equality.

The setting analysis is set in the women's toilet. This can be seen from Vivian, who is seen in the reflection of the glass, and there is a soap for washing hands next to her, which is usually found in the toilet. The camera movement uses the Pan technique, which in the scene moves from top to bottom. The type of camera shot is a medium shot because even though it is only through the reflection of the glass, the camera still shows Vivian's body from head to waist. The analysis sound is non-diegetic. Where, and when the scene occurs, the sound is an instrument that can only be heard by the audience.

Through rebellion



Figure 8. Female students wear tank tops in school (51:30)

Figure 8 shows a situation where female students wear tank tops as a form of protest after Kaitlynn is punished for wearing one, while other female students in similar attire or male students without shirts are not punished. This action is a form of collective protest and resistance against double standards imposed on women. It highlights how dress codes are often used to control women's bodies and enforce discriminatory gender norms. This rebellion demonstrates female solidarity in challenging unjust authority,

aligning with the principles of radical feminism which emphasizes systemic oppression and calls for structural change.

The setting for the scene above is the classroom. This is very clearly visible where the students are sitting in their classroom chairs, and there is various other classroom equipment. The camera movement technique used is Steadicam to avoid shaking. The camera is mounted on a device with shots from several angles. For the camera shot, the type used is a full shot. Where almost the entire classroom is highlighted and shows the students from head to toe. Diegetic sound is the type of sound in this scene. Diegetic comes from the conversation between Mitchell, Kaitlynn, and the teacher.

Through oration



Figure 9. All female students and some male students gathered in the schoolyard

Vivian: *"Speaking in front of people is my worst nightmare. I'm not brave. Uh, I'm not fierce like some of my friends. And I do not fit the prototype of a leader in any way, but here I am anyways. I hate that we are shoved aside. That we are dismissed, ranked, assaulted. And I mean, nobody does anything about it. Nobody listens to us. And that is why I walk out today. That's why I'm standing up here yelling at all of you. It's why I started Moxie. You know what? If you're going to expel somebody, expel me. Okay? It's me. I started Moxie. I am Moxie"* (01:37:15)

From the datum above, it can be seen that Vivian admits to starting *Moxie* in front of all female students and some male students in the schoolyard. She expresses her frustration with the escalating discrimination, stating, "I hate that we are shoved aside. That we are dismissed, ranked, and assaulted. And I mean, nobody does anything about it. Nobody listens to us. And that is why I walk out today. That's why I'm standing up here yelling at all of you. It's why I started *Moxie*." Vivian's oration is the culmination of female voice empowerment and social mobilization. It demonstrates the importance of individual leadership and courage in sparking collective change. This action aligns with the concept of intersectional feminism, which recognizes that oppression can be experienced differently by individuals, but collective solidarity is necessary to fight oppressive systems. This oration also reflects the theory of collective action, where individuals unite to achieve a common goal.

It can be seen that the setting is a schoolyard. This can be seen from the presence of a school bus on the side of the road and students gathered in the yard. The camera movement technique used is Crane, where the camera is installed on a crane to show a wider situation. In this context, it is used to show the situation in the schoolyard as a whole. The sound in this scene is a type of diegetic speech and non-diegetic music. Diegetic speech is seen from Vivian's oration about '*Moxie*,' while non-diegetic sound comes from the background song.

The background song in this scene is sung by Ebony Bones, titled "W.A.R.R.I.O.R." With an energetic melody and passionate lyrics, this song provides an inspiring encouragement by emphasizing the importance of courage, self-acceptance, and the power

of friendship amidst the challenges faced by the characters. The part of the song that said “I’m a warrior, I’m a fighter, I’m a survivor” describe the strength of women in facing difficulties. Other lyrics that said, “but I won’t be held down, I won’t be silenced” represent the resistance and courage of women in fighting and speaking up about discrimination. Other lyrics, “I’m a warrior, I’m a queen, I’m a woman on the rise” represent the strength and resilience of women in facing difficulties and the ability to rise and become stronger. The powerful and meaningful lyrics reflect the struggles of Vivian and her friends in dealing with sexism and discrimination, making this song an anthem for those who fight for their rights. “W.A.R.R.I.O.R.” reminds us that true strength lies in the courage to speak up and take action, encouraging us to not only survive in the face of challenges but also fight against injustice.

In addition to the sound analysis that has been done in each scene. There are songs that are the soundtrack of *Moxie* that describe the struggle against sexism and discrimination. Of the 48 songs that are the background sound in the film *Moxie*, 15 of them show the theme of resistance against sexism and discrimination, such as the song “Grains of Salt.” The song sung by the American punk rock band Tacocat has a meaning about Vivian, who is the main character, starting to question the social norms around her. Based on the analysis in the film *Moxie*, the song “Grains of Salt” describes how Vivian responds to sexism and discrimination that are still considered unimportant in her school environment. The lyrics “don’t take it with a grain of salt” show that women are often underestimated, and this is a critique of a culture that does not value women’s voices. In addition, the lyrics that say “Your words are not a joke” can be interpreted to mean that words that are usually used to belittle women are not funny and cannot be taken lightly. Another, the lyrics that said “I’m not your punchline” and “I’m not your joke” can be interpreted to mean that women are not objects that can be used as jokes.

Vivian’s response is related to the meaning of the song, which is the importance of courage in facing challenges and inspiring others to do well. In line with Vivian’s struggle in the film, the song “Grains of Salt” indirectly influences others to be open-minded. The intention is to open up opportunities to accept different views in society. This is done so that people do not depend on expectations and stigmas that have formed in society. By allowing people to have different views, small changes can be made, especially in terms of equality.

Another song is titled “Rebel Girl,” sung by Bikini Kill. In the film *Moxie*, this song inspired Vivian to start a movement called ‘Moxie,’ which aims to destroy discrimination against women that occurs in her school, Rockport High School. The song “Rebel Girl” represents Vivian, who struggles to reveal the problems in her school. The problem is discrimination against women, including her. At first, this was done secretly because she did not have enough support at that time. After some time, she did this movement openly because her friends began to realize the importance of gender equality in any environment. Therefore, Vivian managed to influence her friends and get support. This song has a meaning about empowerment and solidarity among women. “Rebel Girl” describes the struggle of women in fighting sexism and how they assert their identity and strength. Part of the song that said, “rebel girl, you are the queen of my world” shows that women have the same authority as men. Other lyrics that read “You’re the one that I desire, you’re the one that sets my soul on fire” show that women have the power to arouse emotions in fighting against discrimination.

CONCLUSION

First, in *Moxie*, discrimination against female students at Rockport High School manifests in various ways, perpetrated by both male students and the school itself. The forms of discrimination are direct discrimination, indirect discrimination, and harassment. Among these, female students primarily experience direct and indirect discrimination.

Direct discrimination is seen through actions such as making a “list” that degrades women. Meanwhile, indirect discrimination occurs when school authorities, such as the principal, underestimate complaints made by female students and consider them trivial. In addition, acts of sexual harassment are seen when male characters intentionally touch female students’ private areas. This creates an unsafe environment for women to express themselves and results in their marginalization in the social context.

Second, the film also highlights women’s efforts to fight the discrimination they face. Through persuasive actions such as creating *zines* that raise issues about gender equality, carrying out acts of rebellion such as wearing tank tops as a form of protest, and delivering speeches to voice their experiences of discrimination, the female characters show courage and unity. They aim to shift societal perceptions and advocate for the acknowledgment of their rights. These actions reflect the strong nature of feminism and the desire to create positive change in the school environment.

This research has significant implications for feminist education, gender studies, and the film industry, aiming to promote gender equality and women’s empowerment through inclusive curriculum development and empowering film production strategies. By doing so, it can have a practical impact on raising public awareness about the importance of gender equality and women’s empowerment.

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