

## FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN THE FILM ADAPTATION OF *IT ENDS WITH US* BY JUSTIN BALDONI

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**ABSTRACT** Domestic violence is a widespread social problem that disproportionately affects women and reflects deep-seated gender inequalities embedded in personal, cultural, and institutional structures. Feminist theory offers a critical lens for understanding how patriarchal norms and unequal power dynamics normalize abusive behavior while restricting victims' access to justice and support. This study explores the feminist representation of domestic violence in the film *It Ends with Us*, adapted from Colleen Hoover's bestselling novel, which has drawn significant attention for its portrayal of intimate partner abuse. Using a qualitative approach grounded in feminist criticism, the research examines the film's depiction of physical violence, emotional manipulation, coercive control, and the psychological complexities faced by survivors. The narrative follows Lily Bloom, a woman trapped in a cycle of affection and harm, whose experiences highlight the intergenerational transmission of trauma and the lingering effects of witnessing violence in childhood. Her journey reflects the difficult process of asserting identity and agency within an abusive relationship. The analysis considers cinematic and narrative techniques such as framing, symbolism, dialogue, and character development to assess how the film shapes audience empathy and understanding. It also evaluates whether the film challenges or reinforces traditional gender roles and societal misconceptions surrounding domestic abuse. The findings suggest that *It Ends with Us* has meaningful potential to raise awareness, influence public conversation, and support feminist advocacy aimed at confronting patriarchal structures. Ultimately, the study argues that the film demonstrates the transformative capacity of feminist storytelling to encourage social reflection and empower survivors.

**Keywords:** domestic violence, feminist theory, gender-based violence, media representation, intimate partner violence

### INTRODUCTION

Domestic violence continues to be a pervasive global concern that transcends geographical, cultural, and socioeconomic boundaries, disproportionately affecting women and reinforcing patriarchal systems of power. According to the *World Health Organization and UN Women* (2025), nearly one in three women worldwide has experienced physical and/or sexual violence from an intimate partner during her lifetime, representing approximately 840 million women globally (WHO & UN Women, 2025). Such staggering statistics highlight the enduring systemic inequality that sustains gender-based violence. Feminist scholars argue that domestic violence should be understood not merely as a personal act of aggression but as a structural expression of patriarchal control. Recent research by Bhardwaj and Miller (2021) emphasizes that gendered hierarchies normalize coercion and dependency, particularly in societies where women's emotional labor is culturally expected (Bhardwaj & Miller, 2021). Similarly, Jaffe et al. (2021) underline that intimate partner violence (IPV) persists through social narratives that blame victims and excuse male aggression, thereby obscuring systemic causes (Jaffe et al., 2021).

From a feminist theoretical standpoint, domestic violence functions as a mechanism that maintains male dominance while restricting women's autonomy and self-expression. Situman (2022) notes that gender-based violence must be read as a communicative process where women's voices are silenced through institutional and emotional subjugation (Situman, 2022). This perspective aligns with contemporary feminist criminology, which situates domestic violence within broader structures of patriarchy and sociocultural power (Bhardwaj & Miller, 2021; Ortiz, 2024). Media representation plays a crucial role in shaping how these dynamics are understood; as Wright (2025) argues, public discourse and digital commentary

often reinforce victim-blaming ideologies, thereby sustaining patriarchal attitudes in the cultural imagination (Wright, 2025).

The film *It Ends with Us* (dir. Justin Baldoni, 2024) dramatizes these realities through the story of Lily Bloom, a young woman who escapes an abusive childhood only to confront a similar cycle of violence as an adult. Lily's relationship with neurosurgeon Ryle Kincaid begins with passion and devotion but soon reveals patterns of jealousy, control, and emotional manipulation. When she reconnects with Atlas Corrigan, her compassionate childhood friend, Lily faces a pivotal choice: to repeat the cycle of abuse or to end it. The film's title, echoing Lily's final declaration, "It ends with us", symbolizes intergenerational liberation and resistance to patriarchal violence. Including this brief plot summary allows readers unfamiliar with the film to understand its feminist resonance and emotional stakes. Winarsih and Yustisia (2025) confirm that *It Ends with Us* constructs a distinctly feminist reading of romantic relationships by juxtaposing empathy and critique. Their analysis situates the film within contemporary feminist discourse that views domestic violence as both a personal and structural phenomenon, underscoring the film's cultural relevance and critical potential.

Recent feminist scholarship has increasingly examined how visual storytelling can both challenge and reinforce patriarchal ideologies. Ortiz (2024) explores how cinematic framing and media narratives influence empathy and accountability in portrayals of male violence against women (Ortiz, 2024). Likewise, the *Trauma, Violence & Abuse* (2024) review underscores the importance of integrating feminist perspectives in interpreting the cultural and emotional consequences of intimate partner homicide (Trauma, Violence, & Abuse, 2024). These studies emphasize that feminist media analysis must go beyond textual readings to include visual and emotional languages that shape viewers' moral and political responses.

Despite extensive literary analysis of Colleen Hoover's *It Ends with Us*, few studies have addressed how its film adaptation rearticulates feminist resistance through cinematography, performance, and symbolism. This gap highlights the need to evaluate the film not merely as a romantic drama but as a feminist reinterpretation of domestic violence that connects personal trauma to systemic critique. Through an interdisciplinary lens combining feminist literary criticism and media studies, this research examines how *It Ends with Us* visualizes agency, trauma, and liberation, ultimately challenging patriarchal narratives that equate endurance with love.

Therefore, this study seeks to answer the following research questions: 1) How does the film adaptation of *It Ends with Us* represent domestic violence from a feminist perspective? 2) In what ways does the film challenge traditional gender norms and patriarchal ideologies through its narrative and visual techniques? and 3) how does the adaptation contribute to feminist discourse on agency, trauma, and liberation? The primary objective of this research is to critically analyze the feminist representation of domestic violence in *It Ends with Us*, focusing on how cinematic elements subvert or reproduce patriarchal ideologies. By articulating the feminist dimensions of the film's visual language and emotional storytelling, this study contributes to the growing body of scholarship that positions media as a transformative tool for resistance, empathy, and gender justice.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review discusses previous research related to domestic violence, feminist theory, and media representation to situate this study within the existing body of scholarship. It is divided into four thematic sub-sections: (1) the conceptual framework of domestic violence from feminist perspectives, (2) feminist interpretations in literature, (3) media representation and ethical responsibility, and (4) research gaps in adaptation studies.

This structure enables a clearer articulation of the scholarly context and highlights recent contributions from peer-reviewed journals published within the past five years (2019–2024).

## **Domestic Violence and Feminist Theoretical Frameworks**

Domestic violence (DV) remains a global human rights concern that transcends cultural, socioeconomic, and geographic boundaries (WHO, 2021). Feminist scholars have long argued that DV is not merely an individual problem but a manifestation of systemic gender inequality. According to Dobash and Dobash (1979) and hooks (2000), violence against women reflects patriarchal ideologies that position men as dominant and women as subordinate. These frameworks emphasize that DV cannot be understood in isolation from the broader cultural and institutional structures that sustain gender hierarchies.

Recent scholarship continues to build upon these foundational theories, exploring how gender-based violence is sustained through social norms and affective dependencies. Gracia et al. (2020) provide empirical evidence of the persistent prevalence of intimate partner violence in Europe, showing that attitudes and cultural perceptions still influence reporting and intervention. Such findings affirm feminist claims that DV is a structural issue, not only a personal one. This study adopts that perspective to interpret how *It Ends with Us* portrays domestic violence as both emotional and systemic.

## **Feminist Interpretation in Contemporary Literature**

Literary works play a vital role in revealing how social ideologies about gender and power are internalized within personal relationships. In feminist literary criticism, narratives about abuse are analyzed as cultural texts that expose and contest patriarchal control (Gill, 2007; Lazar, 2005). Colleen Hoover's *It Ends with Us* contributes to this discourse by portraying the psychological complexity of abuse and the survivor's struggle for autonomy.

Recent feminist readings have deepened this discussion. Saputri (2023) examines how the novel reflects internalized gender norms, particularly the cultural expectation that women should endure suffering for love or family stability. Similarly, Tavallaei (2024) explores *It Ends with Us* as part of a broader conversation about intergenerational trauma in modern fiction, illustrating how cycles of abuse are transmitted across generations. These studies demonstrate that Hoover's narrative bridges literature, psychology, and feminist ethics, offering an emotional entry point into the structural realities of domestic violence.

## **Media Representation and Ethical Responsibility**

While literature has long been a medium for feminist critique, contemporary feminist media studies expand this inquiry to visual storytelling, emphasizing how filmic narratives construct empathy and normalize or challenge power. Gill (2007) and Sakhi (2024) both argue that representations of gender violence in popular media require ethical responsibility to avoid trivializing survivors' experiences. Sakhi's recent work underscores the significance of visual language, framing, lighting, and symbolism in shaping public attitudes toward abuse.

Waruwu (2023) similarly stresses that feminist media criticism should interrogate how adaptation and narrative form influence audience interpretation. From this perspective, *It Ends with Us* as a film adaptation becomes more than a retelling of Hoover's story; it becomes a political and pedagogical tool that either challenges or perpetuates patriarchal ideologies. The responsibility of the media, therefore, lies not only in representing violence but in fostering understanding and transformation.

## **Research Gaps and the Need for Adaptation Analysis**

Despite the growing scholarly attention to Hoover's work, most studies focus on the literary dimension rather than the cinematic representation of domestic violence. As Saputri

(2023) and Tavalliae (2024) focus on textual analysis, they provide limited insight into how visual techniques in film convey feminist meaning. Likewise, while Sakhi (2024) and Waruwu (2023) discuss ethical and ideological implications of media representation, they do not specifically analyze the adaptation of literary works into film from a feminist lens.

This gap establishes the rationale and novelty of the present study. By integrating feminist literary theory with film and media analysis, the current research investigates how *It Ends with Us* (the film) reinterprets Hoover's original narrative to emphasize resistance, agency, and intergenerational liberation. In doing so, it aligns with contemporary feminist scholarship that views storytelling, whether written or visual, as a form of activism and advocacy for gender justice.

Taken as a whole, the reviewed literature underscores the interconnectedness between feminist theory, domestic violence, and media representation. Recent works from 2019 to 2024 demonstrate a continued interest in understanding how narratives can expose, critique, or transform patriarchal systems. However, there remains limited engagement with the cinematic adaptation of feminist texts. This study addresses that gap by examining how *It Ends with Us* translates feminist principles into visual storytelling, thereby contributing to both literary and media scholarship on gender-based violence.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative research methodology that integrates feminist literary criticism and cinematic analysis to explore how *It Ends with Us* (2024) represents domestic violence from a feminist perspective. The qualitative approach is suitable for feminist criticism because it prioritizes contextual understanding, lived experience, and interpretive meaning over quantification (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Hesse-Biber, 2020). Feminist research emphasizes the subjective and situated nature of knowledge, aiming to challenge hierarchical structures that marginalize women's voices within academic inquiry (Gunaratnam & Lewis, 2021).

### Research Design and Justification

This research adopts a feminist interpretive paradigm, positioning film as a sociocultural text that both reflects and shapes gender ideologies. A qualitative design allows for in-depth exploration of symbolic, visual, and emotional dimensions of cinematic storytelling, elements essential for understanding how gendered power relations are constructed and resisted on screen (Lazar, 2023). The approach is further justified by its alignment with feminist epistemology, which values reflexivity, empathy, and ethical engagement with representations of trauma and agency.

### Data Collection

Data were collected through textual and visual analysis of the 2024 film adaptation of *It Ends with Us*, directed by Justin Baldoni. The analysis focused on eight key scenes selected purposively based on their narrative and symbolic relevance to feminist themes such as emotional abuse, coercive control, intergenerational trauma, and acts of resistance. Each scene was viewed multiple times using NVivo 14 qualitative analysis software to facilitate open and axial coding of emergent themes (Nowell et al., 2017; Jackson & Bazeley, 2019). The visual data were supported by dialogue transcription, shot composition, camera angles, lighting, and color palette analysis, ensuring consistency and depth in interpretation.

Secondary data were obtained from peer-reviewed feminist media and gender studies journals (2019–2025) to contextualize findings within current academic discourse (e.g., Bhardwaj & Miller, 2021; Ortiz, 2024; Wright, 2025). This triangulation enhances the reliability and theoretical grounding of the study.

## Data Analysis

The study employed thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2021) updated six-phase framework for qualitative interpretation:

1. Familiarization with data (viewing and transcribing scenes multiple times)
2. Initial coding (identifying gendered patterns and power relations)
3. Theme generation (categorizing recurring motifs such as emotional manipulation, empathy, and feminist resistance)
4. Reviewing themes (cross-checking themes with theoretical constructs in feminist criticism)
5. Defining and naming themes (e.g., "patriarchal rationalization" or "spatial trauma")
6. Producing the report (synthesizing textual and visual evidence into interpretive arguments)

This iterative process ensured analytical transparency and reflexivity. Coding decisions were documented in analytic memos to maintain an audit trail, a key principle of rigor in qualitative feminist research (Nowell et al., 2017).

## Reflexivity and Ethical Considerations

Given the sensitive nature of domestic violence, the researcher maintained reflexive awareness throughout the analysis, acknowledging positionality and interpretive biases (Hesse-Biber, 2020). Ethical considerations included avoiding sensationalization of abuse, emphasizing survivor agency, and respecting feminist ethics of care in interpretation.

This methodological framework ensures that the qualitative design not only captures the complexity of feminist themes in the film but also upholds the transparency, credibility, and ethical integrity expected in contemporary feminist qualitative research.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the thematic findings derived from the qualitative analysis of *It Ends with Us* (2024) and their interpretation within feminist literary and media criticism. The discussion is organized thematically to maintain analytical clarity and coherence. Drawing from textual and visual analysis, the findings reveal how the film portrays domestic violence, trauma, and feminist agency through cinematic language while reflecting contemporary feminist theory. At the same time, this section acknowledges the film's potential representational limitations and the persistence of gendered stereotypes, ensuring a balanced and reflexive critique (Gill, 2023; Ortiz, 2024; Wright, 2025).

### Findings

The findings reveal how *It Ends with Us* portrays domestic violence and feminist resistance through narrative, dialogue, and cinematic elements. Five dominant themes emerged from the analysis: generational trauma, emotional dependency, patriarchal rationalization, contrasting masculinities, and feminist agency.

### Generational Trauma and the Inheritance of Violence

The film constructs intergenerational trauma not as mere backstory but as the ideological foundation of its feminist narrative. Lily Bloom's fear of becoming like her mother, enduring abuse in silence, embodies the internalized cycle of violence. Her reflection, "*Cycles exist because they are excruciating to break*" (01:13:24), encapsulates the psychological inertia that afflicts survivors of inherited trauma. This theme aligns with feminist psychological perspectives emphasizing that trauma is transmitted through emotional memory, cultural silence, and normalized suffering (Murray & Graves, 2023). This portrayal of intergenerational trauma aligns with broader feminist cinematic trends across global contexts. Parvathy and Tripathi (2024) highlight how contemporary South Asian films

are reshaping women's responses to gender-based violence, moving from silent endurance toward visible resistance. This reinforces the transformative potential of Lily's decision to break the cycle of abuse as a globally resonant feminist act. Ahmed's (2017) concept of "affective inheritance" similarly highlights how emotional endurance is gendered as a moral obligation for women.

Cinematically, the *mise-en-scène* externalizes this emotional inheritance. Lily's flower shop, bright, colorful, and open, symbolizes rebirth and autonomy, whereas her apartment with Ryle becomes increasingly claustrophobic, reflecting fear and confinement. This visual opposition echoes Tavallai's (2024) notion of *spatial trauma*, where physical spaces embody emotional oppression.

Nevertheless, while the film powerfully depicts cyclical trauma, it risks reinforcing the stereotype that women's empowerment is born solely from suffering. Feminist critics (Gill, 2023; Gunaratnam & Lewis, 2021) caution that narratives linking womanhood to pain may romanticize endurance rather than critique it. Although *It Ends with Us* transforms trauma into resistance, its emphasis on individual healing sometimes overshadows systemic solutions, such as community advocacy and policy intervention (Murray & Graves, 2023; Wright, 2025).

### **Emotional Dependency and Psychological Entrapment**

The film redefines emotional dependency as a socially constructed form of entrapment rather than personal weakness. Lily's admission, "*Preventing your heart from forgiving someone you love is actually a hell of a lot harder than simply forgiving them*" (00:56:12), conveys the emotional tension between affection and self-preservation. This representation parallels the feminist affect theory articulated by Ahmed (2017), which shows how women are culturally oriented toward self-sacrifice in love.

Close-up shots and silence dominate these scenes, drawing the audience into Lily's psychological conflict. Such aesthetic restraint cultivates empathy over judgment, resonating with Gill's (2023) call for feminist media to evoke "critical empathy" rather than voyeuristic pity.

However, as Wright (2025) observes, empathy must not become a narrative device that romanticizes endurance. When Ryle's remorse is framed in dim lighting and intimate angles, the film risks portraying his violence as a tragic flaw rather than an act of patriarchal control. Ortiz (2024) similarly argues that popular media often overemphasize male emotional struggle, diverting attention from systemic accountability. By incorporating institutional and social contexts, such as legal constraints or public apathy, the film could have offered a more grounded feminist realism. Harrison (2023) argues that feminist media must not only depict violence but also challenge the audience's viewing ethics, urging spectators to confront, rather than consume, trauma as spectacle. In *It Ends with Us*, this critical engagement is achieved through empathetic framing that resists sensationalism, prompting viewers to acknowledge the moral and political weight of domestic abuse.

### **Patriarchal Rationalizations and Abuser Psychology**

Ryle Kincaid's statement, "*There is no such thing as bad people. We're all just people who sometimes do bad things*" (00:43:08), exemplifies patriarchal rationalization, moral ambiguity used to justify control and violence. This reflects findings from feminist criminology, where such rhetoric normalizes male authority and blurs moral accountability (Bhardwaj & Miller, 2021; Connell, 2021).

By depicting Ryle as intelligent, caring, yet abusive, the film refuses to flatten him into a caricature. This complexity aligns with Gunaratnam and Lewis's (2021) argument that feminist analysis should expose how patriarchy produces the conditions for violence, rather than treating abusers as anomalies. Still, nuance can be double-edged: excessive empathy

toward perpetrators risks recasting them as victims of their emotions. Wright (2025) warns that this “redeemable man” trope can dilute feminist critique if accountability is not equally emphasized.

Furthermore, as Kaufman and Straub (2022) note, representations that humanize abusers without showing social consequences may perpetuate cultural myths of male redemption. While *It Ends with Us* depicts Ryle’s remorse, it stops short of addressing structural justice, leaving patriarchal impunity largely unchallenged. Similarly, Owusu (2022) observes that female filmmakers worldwide increasingly employ narrative complexity to expose patriarchal rationalizations of abuse, refusing simplistic portrayals of perpetrators as either monstrous or redeemable. This global trend parallels *It Ends with Us* in its portrayal of Ryle, an abuser whose intellect and remorse problematically blur moral boundaries.

### **Contrasting Masculinities: Atlas as an Alternative Model**

Atlas Corrigan serves as a narrative counterpoint to Ryle, embodying an alternative masculinity grounded in empathy, patience, and care. His line, “*You deserve to be loved gently*” (01:36:15), articulates a counter-discourse to toxic passion, redefining love through emotional responsibility. This portrayal corresponds to Connell’s (2021) theory of inclusive masculinity, which emphasizes relational ethics and vulnerability.

Cinematically, Atlas is framed within open, natural settings, parks, sunlight, and shared spaces, contrasting Ryle’s confined interiors. This visual dichotomy reinforces feminist ideals of emotional safety and freedom (Gill, 2023; Lazar, 2023).

Yet, despite these strengths, Atlas’s depiction risks falling into the “savior male” stereotype.

Feminist media analyses (Ortiz, 2024; Wright, 2025) caution that presenting a flawless man as the antidote to patriarchy can inadvertently shift the narrative away from female agency. While Atlas represents ethical masculinity, his idealization underplays Lily’s self-determination. A more balanced portrayal would present love as a partnership rather than salvation, echoing Gunaratnam and Lewis’s (2021) advocacy for egalitarian gender relations.

### **Feminist Agency and Resistance as Liberation**

The film’s climax crystallizes Lily’s feminist awakening. Her final declaration, “*It stops here. With me and you. It ends with us*” (01:51:47), marks a decisive rupture in the generational cycle of abuse. This moment enacts what Ahmed (2017) calls “living a feminist life,” turning personal refusal into political transformation.

The cinematography mirrors this liberation: the lighting warms, the camera steadies, and Lily’s figure occupies the center of the frame. This shift from shadow to brightness visualizes her reclaimed autonomy, echoing Butler’s (2019) notion of “ethical performativity,” where speech and action become sites of resistance.

Still, the film situates empowerment largely within the individual sphere. Feminist scholars (Gill, 2023; Wright, 2025) emphasize that sustainable liberation requires collective frameworks, support networks, policy advocacy, and cultural solidarity. While *It Ends with Us* successfully reframes domestic violence as a feminist issue, it could extend its critique by depicting broader systems of accountability and community resilience.

### **Discussion**

*It Ends with Us* delivers a nuanced feminist portrayal of domestic violence through narrative depth, psychological realism, and symbolic cinematography. The film challenges patriarchal myths that equate love with control and suffering with virtue, broadening feminist discourse by representing violence not merely as physical harm but as emotional, psychological, and structural oppression. Through its narrative complexity and visual storytelling, the film transforms domestic abuse from a private trauma into a public feminist discourse on power, gender, and agency.

### **Feminist Representation and the Breaking of Cycles**

Lily Bloom's journey reframes survival as a conscious act of resistance rather than passive endurance. Her final decision to end the generational pattern of abuse, signaled by her line, "*It stops here. With me and you. It ends with us*," marks a turning point where personal experience becomes political defiance. This transformation reflects Ahmed's (2017) notion of "living a feminist life," in which private refusal becomes a form of public resistance against patriarchal inheritance. Through Lily, the film articulates a feminist ethics of self-definition, showing that empowerment arises from conscious choice and self-awareness, not through pain or submission.

At the same time, the narrative exposes the tension between empowerment and endurance, between healing as an individual act and transformation as a collective movement. While *It Ends with Us* foregrounds personal strength, it also gestures toward a broader feminist agenda: disrupting the normalization of violence within intimate spaces. This balance between individual and systemic critique is what situates the film firmly within contemporary feminist cinematic discourse (Gill, 2023; Murray & Graves, 2023; Wright, 2025).

### **Emotional Complexity and Feminist Empathy**

A key strength of the film lies in its portrayal of emotional dependency and trauma bonding, which redefines victimhood as a condition of emotional complexity rather than weakness. By illustrating Lily's conflicting emotions, her love, fear, and hope, the film humanizes the psychological depth of abuse survivors. This narrative approach rejects the binary of "strong versus weak women" and instead acknowledges the layered emotional realities of trauma (Miller & Thompson, 2023).

In doing so, *It Ends with Us* embodies what Gill (2023) describes as *critical empathy*, a feminist representational strategy that encourages understanding without romanticizing pain. The film's focus on empathy as awareness rather than sentimentality prevents the spectator from misreading Lily's endurance as moral virtue. Instead, her struggle becomes a lens for exposing how patriarchal conditioning manipulates emotional labor and forgiveness. By refusing to demonize or idealize, the narrative situates emotion as both a site of vulnerability and feminist critique.

### **Visual Narrative as Political Expression**

Beyond dialogue, the film's cinematographic language functions as an extension of feminist critique. The recurring contrast between light and darkness, openness and confinement, mirrors Lily's emotional evolution from fear to autonomy. Her flower shop, bathed in natural light, embodies rebirth and independence, while Ryle's apartment, dominated by dim and constricted lighting, symbolizes emotional suffocation. These spatial juxtapositions constitute what Tavallaie (2024) terms *spatial trauma*, where physical environments manifest psychological imprisonment. The film's visual composition also exemplifies what Nair (2024) terms "feminist aesthetics of trauma," where spatial design and lighting are not merely stylistic but act as political expressions of survival and healing. In *It Ends with Us*, the interplay between open light in Lily's flower shop and the confined domestic scenes functions as a feminist visual metaphor for reclaiming agency.

Such visual metaphors exemplify Butler's (2019) and Ahmed's (2017) claims that feminist politics can be expressed through embodied gestures and aesthetic forms. The camera's gradual shift toward balanced framing as Lily asserts her agency transforms the act of seeing into an act of political witnessing. In this sense, the film's formal design is not merely aesthetic but ideological; it teaches viewers how to see power, empathy, and resistance through visual structure.

## Feminist Agency and Masculinity Reimagined

The interplay between Ryle and Atlas represents a critical dialogue on masculinity within feminist film narratives. Ryle's rationalizations, "*We're all just people who sometimes do bad things*", reflect patriarchal moral relativism (Bhardwaj & Miller, 2021), while Atlas's gentle demeanor embodies an alternative form of masculinity rooted in care and respect. This contrast invites reflection on how patriarchal conditioning not only shapes men's actions but also limits emotional expression.

Connell's (2021) theory of inclusive masculinity provides a framework for interpreting Atlas's character: he models relational equality without domination. However, as Ortiz (2024) and Wright (2025) caution, such portrayals must avoid idealization. The risk of presenting Atlas as the perfect savior figure can inadvertently shift agency away from Lily, making male goodness the condition for female liberation. A more radical feminist reading would instead emphasize mutual accountability, collective empathy, and the dismantling of gender hierarchies that sustain abuse.

## Feminist Storytelling and Structural Transformation

The synthesis of these thematic threads suggests that *It Ends with Us* is more than a romantic drama, it is a feminist text that redefines love, pain, and resistance through the intertwined lenses of emotion and politics. By integrating empathy with critique, the film contributes meaningfully to contemporary feminist media discourse, offering a layered reflection on how women reclaim voice and agency amid patriarchal control.

Yet, as with many mainstream adaptations, the film's focus on individual redemption sometimes reproduces the tropes it seeks to subvert, the "strong woman through suffering" and the "redeemable man." To transcend these limitations, future feminist storytelling in popular cinema must foreground structural and collective transformation alongside personal empowerment.

Ultimately, *It Ends with Us* succeeds in provoking dialogue on the emotional, social, and systemic dimensions of domestic violence. It exemplifies the transformative capacity of feminist media to engage audiences critically, bridge empathy with awareness, and advocate for justice not only as a private healing journey but as a collective social imperative.

## CONCLUSION

*It Ends with Us* offers a nuanced and compelling feminist portrayal of domestic violence, emphasizing the emotional, psychological, and intergenerational complexities faced by survivors. Through the character of Lily Bloom, the film critiques patriarchal ideologies that normalize abusive behavior and silence female resistance. By combining intimate storytelling with symbolic visual elements, it draws attention to how love, trauma, and power are entangled within gendered relationships. The narrative resists simplistic victim–abuser binaries and portrays the moral ambiguity and emotional turmoil that many survivors experience. Ryle's characterization reveals how abuse can be obscured by remorse and charisma, while Atlas provides a counterexample of non-toxic masculinity rooted in empathy. The representation of generational trauma and Lily's eventual act of resistance illustrates the feminist principle that personal empowerment is intrinsically political.

This study contributes to feminist literary and media criticism by bridging theoretical and cinematic perspectives in analyzing how visual narratives represent domestic violence. The research offers two significant contributions: first, it highlights the role of adaptation studies in expanding feminist discourse beyond textual analysis, and second, it demonstrates how filmic representation can function as feminist pedagogy, educating audiences, promoting empathy, and challenging patriarchal values. In a broader context, the findings have implications for media practitioners, educators, and advocacy organizations seeking to use storytelling as a tool for social awareness and gender justice.

However, this research is limited by its qualitative scope and its focus on a single film adaptation. It primarily relies on textual and cinematic analysis without empirical audience reception data, which could have provided a deeper understanding of how viewers interpret feminist messages in *It Ends with Us*. Additionally, the study focuses on Western cultural narratives; future research could explore comparative perspectives, such as how domestic violence and feminist agency are portrayed in non-Western film industries or in diverse sociocultural contexts. Scholars may also expand this work by conducting audience studies or applying intersectional feminist frameworks to examine race, class, and sexuality alongside gender-based violence.

In conclusion, this study affirms that *It Ends with Us* exemplifies the transformative power of feminist storytelling in confronting patriarchal norms and reimagining female subjectivity. By framing liberation not as escape but as conscious refusal and ethical self-definition, the film encourages both scholars and audiences to view domestic violence through a lens of empowerment and systemic critique. Continued interdisciplinary inquiry between feminist theory, literature, and visual media remains essential to advancing understanding, advocacy, and representation in the ongoing fight against gender-based violence.

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