

Feminism in movies just wright movie review

[Sociology](#), [Feminism](#)



Feminism in Movies: Just Wright

Introduction

Decades after Mary Wollstonecraft began the suffrage movement, women's liberation is in its third wave and has changed its style with feminists shedding the image of bra-burning activists to one of "the woman on the top" (Britannica Encyclopedia). According to prolific feminist studies writer Susan J. Douglas, as advocated by the British female pop group, Spice Girls, feminism has become a dirty word, and girl power has become the acceptable way to think and speak of strong women (2010). Feminists are no longer women clad in baggy clothes striving for better recognition and respect for their gender. In the modern world, they wear high heels and short skirts. This seems to make the concept of feminism sound somewhat shallow. Does this, however, mean that feminism has reached its goal, and that the world no longer needs to fight for the cause of gender equality? This paper attempts to answer this question by analyzing the movie *Just Wright* (Hamri 2010) and comparing it with the ideas presented in Susan J. Douglas' *Enlightened Sexism*.

Just Wright is a movie about a black female physiotherapist who falls in love with a dashing NBA player. This is seen as a problem because she is a woman with average looks. Moreover, she has a very good-looking female friend who nurtures an ambition of becoming a NBA star wife. The NBA star is played by Scott MacKnight, who seems oblivious to Latifah's charms and very aptly falls for her friend, Paula Patton. In contrast to Latifah, Patton is shown as a shallow woman who only cares for appearances and cannot deal

with the pressures that arise when MacKnight is debilitatingly injured in a game. Latifah then comes to the rescue, and with her professional skills, she heals MacKnight and sends him back to the game court. The story thus revolves around a love triangle, but unfortunately, it is similar to several movies of its kind today that have sprung like mushrooms in the rainy season. It is a breakthrough movie in many ways. It has black characters playing central roles in a movie that is characteristically new age. New age in this essay refers to the movies or books that tend to be emotional and relationship based, focusing mainly on the female perspective or rather a presumed female perspective of modern life. Examples of this phenomenon are seen in sitcoms such as *Sex and the City* (Star 1998–2004) and movies such as *The Princess Diaries* (Marshall 2001). Another name for this new age art is “chick-flick” (Stevenson and Lindberg 2010). While the term refers to cinema only, it has become such a wide phenomenon that one can assume that the term is applicable to books as well—as with the growing popularity of the genre, books like *Girls in Pants: The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants* have become best sellers (Brashares, 2003). *Just Wright* is different because of its focus on black characters, but it has the resounding monotonousness of this new age art. The fact that black characters play the leading roles in a chick-flick movie can be seen as an attempt to lessen racial disparities in a racially segregated America with a black president. Here, Queen Latifah, a black woman, plays the leading actress, unlike several Hollywood movies that tend to cast black people in supporting roles or even as sidekicks (the white influence on the movie and its narrative remains conspicuously visible nevertheless). However, this positive factor cannot make one overlook the

negative fact that chick-flicks are propounded as the “ in” thing as they seem to propagate feminism and represent the woman of today. Thus, by associating black feminism with this trend the situation is perhaps only getting worse.

Discussion

The most pressing question that emerges from Just Wright is, are women, irrespective of their place in lives, overtly emotional beings who love high heels and champagne and showing off their toned bodies? If feminism has truly become this shallow, has the fight for gender equality, which is about women having the same rights and station in life as men, unnecessary? The movie at least differs from others of its kind in some aspects: the round and curvy Latifah shows that women need not be pressurized to be slim toned “ bimbettes.” The fact that Queen Latifah, who has been widely regarded as an icon of feminism, is the central focus of the movie gives it a feminist appeal (Britannica Encyclopedia). Moreover, she plays a “ straight-shooting” woman who lives life by her values, and this is a positive aspect of the movie. There is also a scene in the movie, where Latifah asks MacKnight out on a date, and this is again a display of a new role that says that it is acceptable for modern women to seek partners and to vocalize and express their feelings about it without any reservations. However, despite all the above-mentioned factors, the movie only has the appearance of a feminist-minded movie; it lacks a true understanding of what feminism actually stands for.

While Just Wright shows women capable of having jobs that require high qualifications—with Latifah as a physiotherapist (not a clichéd women’s job like a hairstylist or secretary)—it also shows them as maudlin beings obsessed with relationships. Several trailers of the movie aired on television had themes such as “ can a regular girl attract the attention of an NBA player over a ‘ hot’ girl” categorize women by their looks. Furthermore, Latifah is shown flipping through gossip magazines in the movie, and Patton is shown to be obsessed about being with a man with a career in basketball. What is even more clichéd is the fact that Latifah and Patton are clearly portrayed in black and white as the nice and sensible woman and the shallow and selfish one, respectively. However, the fact that shallowness in women is associated with presentable and glamorous looks, and depth, with natural looks and easy-going attitude is again clichéd. This cliché while attempting to set a forefront of feminism is actually further stereotyping the image of women. The association of looks with socially accepted virtues neglects women’s ability and instincts to react to different situations. Moreover, the romance-novel influence is also apparent: the leading actors’ eyes meet across rooms and they have romantic moments over silly squabbles. This casts a unfavourable light over the feminist theme in the movie as it correlates women with Harlequin romance novels. The movie, while making an attempt to depict feminism, represents many of its kind that show women obsessed with their looks and image, Cinderella-type fairytale stories, and relationships while striving to live their lives with equal ambitions and dreams as that of men. It can be complimented for departing from the norms of Hollywood romantic comedies, as it embodies a physical—

in Latifah's well rounded figure—and racial outline—owing to the fact that she is an African-American—uncharacteristic of leading characters in well-known romantic-comedies.

Douglas points out that in 1999, the top five jobs for women in the country were not surgeon, CEO, or attorney, but secretary, retail and personal sales workers, managers and administrators, elementary school teachers, or registered nurses. In the next eight years, the top five jobs for women were still the same and only their order had changed (3). She questions, how is it possible that when cinema and other forms of art—as in movies such as *Just Wright*—continue to show women as aware of their sexuality, but superior to men in terms of growing professional abilities, there is no change in the statistics that reflect the quality of jobs for women. It is thus foolish to assume that the job of feminism is over. She also relates facts such as women's income level in the country is only 80 percent of what men's income and the Ladies Professional Golf Association had to call in hairstylists and makeup experts to enhance their players' appearance on the golf course to drive her point (3).

The media suggests that non-intelligent women are in power as they have recognized their sexuality. It instigates women to barter their intellect with looks by dressing provocatively and using their looks to become “objectified” and in the process, powerful over men, who are dazzled by the display of sexuality (5). The images of women in media seem to contradict the true image of real-life women. Thus, the media is only providing women with fantasies of power (5). Donna Haraway, a distinguished professor of

History of Consciousness, believes that while technology has become an extension of our very existence, it has its advantages . This is especially true in the depiction of women in media. Women are better represented with a technological imagery. She relishes the onset of technological imagery and says that, as far as appearances are concerned, technology has helped in giving women a stronger image. She believes a compassionate robot woman in a science fiction movie is a far superior representation of feminism than that of a gorgeous and sexuality-oozing Greek goddess .

There are two questions to be considered before censuring Just Wright for its depiction of feminism. The first question is, “ is it the responsibility of art to resurrect human life? Are mediums like cinema and books not supposed to provide people with escapism routes?” The current depiction of feminism in the media can then perhaps be seen as a form of escapism (6). However, while it is true that art imitates life, the power of art to influence life in undeniable. Therefore, the problem with the above-mentioned portrayal of feminism is that it seems to influence the people, especially the youth, into assuming a shallow attitude that likens good looks and societal image with feminism and undermines the true problems with gender inequality. Douglas expresses her own love of escapism, but abhors its use to undermine the status of women in the following manner:

Despite my own love of escaping into worlds in which women, by turns, solve crimes, are good bosses, live in huge houses, can buy whatever they want, perform life-saving surgeries, and find love, I am here to argue, forcefully, for the importance of Wariness, with a capital W. Women and men should be

much more indignant about the resurrection of sexist images that undermine girls and women's self esteem and seek to keep us, and especially our daughters, in their place. And there is still much unfinished business for girls and women in the country, and we should resist -- indeed, challenge -- the seductive message that full equality has been achieved and that feminist politics are passé and no longer necessary. (2011)

She states Betty Friedan's famous quote " a problem with no name" in context to the fact that an entire generation of young girls and women, that is, " the girl power generation," are under the influence of the media preaching that they can be anything they want and do anything they wish as long as they are sexually appealing and pose no threat to men (2011).

The second question is " is it true that to be truly classified as a romantic comedy, a movie cannot move away from stereotyping the female image?"

Several romantic movies starring non-white actors frequently show outspoken female leading characters, such as Jennifer Lopez in *Maid in Manhattan* (Wang 2002). We should consider the fact that perhaps going against this stereotyping of female characters is unworkable in romantic comedies, because for the couple to end up together the most " straight-from-the-shoulder" female character has to be displayed showing conformist thoughts and actions; for example, forgiving a erring husband or boyfriend or feeling the need to have children and to manage a household. Even the most eccentric of characters have to give in to the ideology of either living together happily for ever or simply, marriage (Krutnik 2002). However, it should be noted that this is simply a popular trend, and trends have been broken in cinema several times. In fact, even in *Maid in Manhattan*, at the

end, Jennifer Lopez's character is shown to have achieved the goal of having become a manager from a mere waitress.

Conclusion

This paper discussed the depiction of women in cinema using the example of the women Just Wright. The observations in the movie were highlighted using Susan Douglas' work Enlightened Sexism. According to Douglas, the portrayal of feminism in cinema and popular media tends to emphasize on the women's looks and neglects their intellect. This is done in a very subtle manner, as although women are shown to be powerful in terms of career and stature in life, it is their looks and manner of dressing that always receives the utmost attention. The young generation, especially is pressurized to focus on their looks in order to be taken seriously as women. The true ideals of feminism, that is, to have equal rights and opportunities as men has been forgotten, largely owing to the fact that such kind of feminism does not fit in the current mode. The movie in question attempts to focus on feminism, but eventually fails to do so. Irrespective of the fact that the leading character is well-known feminist figure and that the movie revolves around her, the narrative style impresses all the wrong ideals of feminism.

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