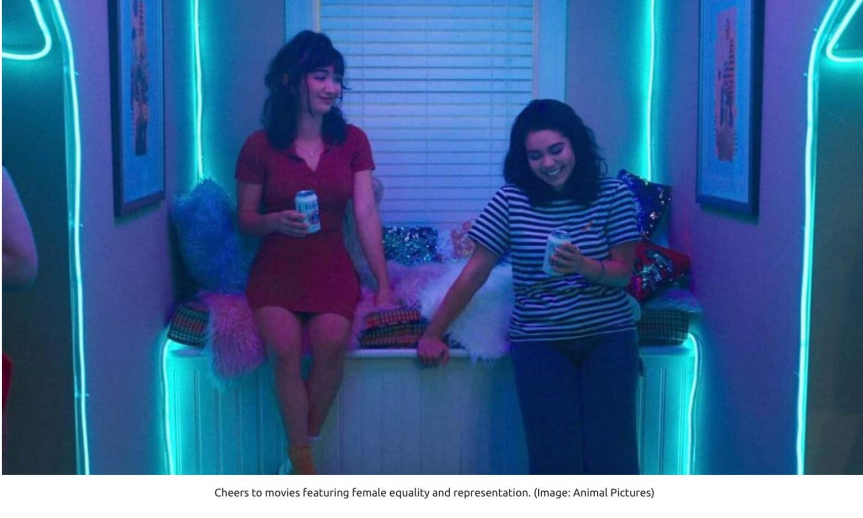


# Essential and Inclusive Feminist Films to Add to Your Watchlist

There's no absolute to what makes a feminist film — it's a spectrum.

By Jordan Nishkian | Last modified: January 17, 2024



Cheers to movies featuring female equality and representation. (Image: Animal Pictures)

There are many ways a film can be feminist. It could push [feminism's](#) sociopolitical agenda of equality, encourage conversations on female, trans, and nonbinary experiences, or disrupt the boundaries of the binary entirely.

Some of the most powerful pieces of feminist media that come to mind share parallel plots of a female character finding agency despite living in a world where she's denied rights and/or opportunities because of her sex or gender. With that being said, a film doesn't have to make a big deal about overcoming sexism to be feminist, either.

One of my favorite examples of inclusivity and representation in TV is "Schitt's Creek." The show is known for its [LGBTQIA+](#) representation and for highlighting the joy of being seen. While many LGBTQIA+ storylines showcase the trials and prejudices queer characters can face, "Schitt's Creek" creator [Dan Levy](#) decided to craft a world without it. "I have no patience for homophobia," Levy shared at the 2018 Vulture Festival. "As a result, it's been amazing to take that into the show. We show love and tolerance. If you put something like that out of the equation, you're saying that doesn't exist and shouldn't exist."

Similarly, a film's plot doesn't have to create a misogynistic world to build a feminist storyline; it's not wrong or a bad thing to do, but it also isn't mandatory. Sure, we love a confident, badass female character who can overcome these trials, but we also love a soft, flawed female character who doesn't need to impress male characters (or viewers) by disrupting an absurd patriarchal standard. We're allowed to respect these female characters simply for existing — they don't have to go to an extreme to earn it.

This introduces another important point: A strong female lead doesn't guarantee a film is feminist.

So what needs to happen for a movie to be considered a feminist film? It doesn't need to be an over-the-top melodrama about overthrowing the patriarchy, it certainly doesn't need a trope-y "strong female lead," and it doesn't need a "Good for Her" ending. It doesn't even need to pass the [Bechdel-Wallace Test](#).

In my opinion, its primary goal is to exist beyond sexism and highlight the female experience through a female or nonbinary lens, but this could be different for everyone — all the more reason to showcase more diverse voices and experiences.

## Notes on Feminism and Inclusion



Have the tissues ready before you press play on "The Farewell." (Image: Big Beach)

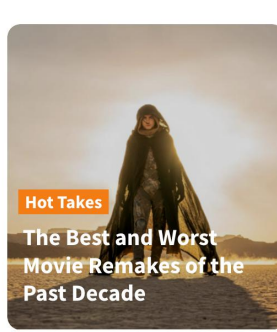
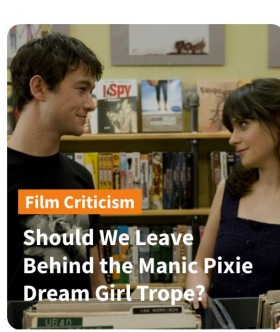
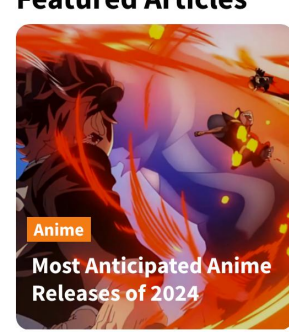
Feminism in film has come a long way, especially in the last few decades, but there's still plenty of room to grow — especially in the diversity and inclusion department.

Say it with me: Representation matters for all women.

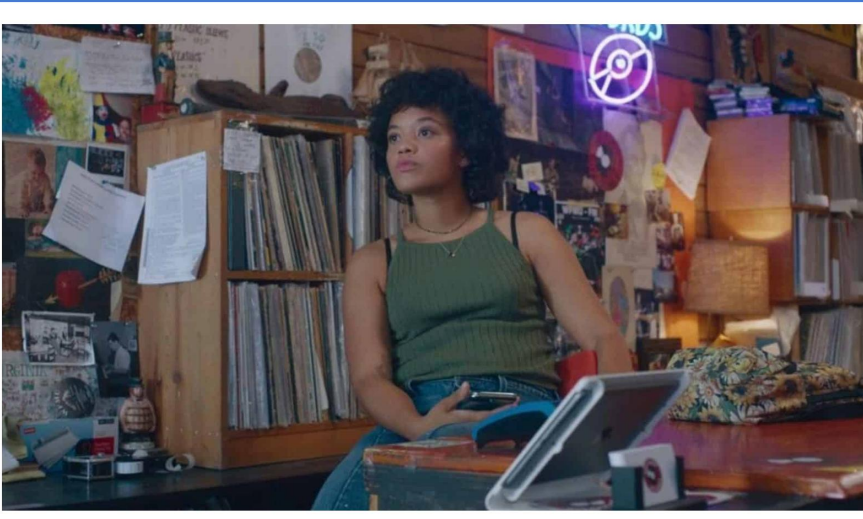
Most mainstream feminist films are ones that star or are about white, heterosexual women who were assigned female at birth. Don't get me wrong: Feminist storylines with white, cis-straight women as the leads still hold merit, but we can't pretend that this narrative accounts for all women's perspectives.

There will always be room at the table for more diverse stories, voices, and backgrounds, and hopefully, we'll see more of those in the future.

## Featured Articles



## 35 Feminist Films to Watch



Enjoy a list of movies that explore women's relationships with themselves, their loved ones, and the world around them. (Image: Burn Later Productions)

This list barely scratches the surface of all the feminist films out there, but here are some that are definitely [worth the watch](#) (or rewatch).

### 'Jeanne Dielman, 23 Commerce Quay, 1080 Brussels' (1975)

A widowed housewife lives a mundane, routine life until a series of slight interruptions leads to major and unexpected changes.

[Stream on Max](#)

### 'The Color Purple' (1985)

The story of a Black woman in the South who finds her identity after surviving decades of abuse.

[Stream on Max](#)

### 'Desperately Seeking Susan' (1985)

A bored housewife from the suburbs of New Jersey becomes captivated by a free-spirited woman featured in personal columns.

[Rent or buy on Amazon Prime Video](#)

### 'Thelma & Louise' (1991)

Embarking on what was meant to be an adventure, two best friends find themselves on the run from law enforcement.

[Rent or buy on Amazon Prime Video](#)

### 'The Watermelon Woman' (1996)

A young Black lesbian filmmaker delves into the life of The Watermelon Woman, a Black actress from the 1930s known for portraying 'mammy' archetypes.

[Rent or buy on Amazon Prime Video](#)

### 'But I'm a Cheerleader' (1999)

A sweet, naive teenager is enrolled in a rehabilitation camp by her conservative parents when she's suspected of being a lesbian.

[Stream on Amazon Prime Video](#)

### 'The Virgin Suicides' (1999)

In suburban Detroit during the mid-1970s, a group of male friends become fixated on five sisters who are closely guarded by their strict, religious parents.

[Stream on FuboTV](#)

### 'Whale Rider' (2002)

A modern coming-of-age tale of love, rejection, and triumph unfolds as a young Maori girl strives to fulfill a destiny that her grandfather refuses to acknowledge.

[Stream on Hulu](#)

### 'In the Cut' (2003)

A writing professor from New York City has an affair with a police detective who's investigating the murder of a young woman in her neighborhood.

[Rent or buy on Amazon Prime Video](#)

### 'Saving Face' (2004)

A gay Chinese American woman and her traditionalist mother grapple with their reluctance to publicly acknowledge secret loves that defy cultural expectations.

[Stream on FuboTV](#)

### 'Persepolis' (2007)

Based on the eponymous graphic novel, "Persepolis" follows an outspoken Iranian girl growing up during the Islamic Revolution.

[Rent or buy on Apple TV](#)

### 'Appropriate Behavior' (2014)

A young woman juggles identifying as the idealistic Persian daughter, a hip Brooklynite, and a politically correct bisexual — without success.

[Stream on Amazon Prime Video](#)

### 'Boy Meets Girl' (2014)

A young trans woman in Virginia dreams of becoming a designer in New York.

[Stream on Philo](#)

### 'A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night' (2014)

The desolate Iranian ghost town of Bad City may be thick with the scent of death and isolation, yet its inhabitants still don't know that they're being hunted by a lonely vampire.

[Rent or buy on Amazon Prime Video](#)

### 'Obvious Child' (2014)

An unexpected pregnancy forces a 20-something comedian to face the realities of independent womanhood for the first time.

[Stream on Hulu](#)

### 'American Honey' (2016)

With nothing to lose, a teenage girl hits the road with a traveling magazine sales crew, entangling herself in a whirlwind of hard partying, law-bending, and young love.

[Stream on Max](#)

### 'The Love Witch' (2016)

A modern-day witch is set on getting men to fall in love with her, but her magic comes with fatal consequences.

[Stream on Peacock](#)

### 'The Breadwinner' (2017)

A young girl in Afghanistan disguises herself as a boy to provide for her family after her father is captured by the Taliban.

[Rent or buy on Apple TV](#)

### 'Disobedience' (2017)

A woman navigates the boundaries of faith and sexuality upon returning to the Orthodox Jewish community that ostracized her for her attraction to a female childhood friend.

[Stream on Hulu](#)

### 'Lady Bird' (2017)

The coming-of-age story of an artistically inclined high school student in Sacramento who dreams of escaping to an East Coast college.

[Stream on Netflix](#)

### 'Signature Move' (2017)

Seeking stress relief from caring for her mother, a closeted lesbian Muslim woman takes up lucha-style wrestling when she falls in love with a Mexican woman.

[Stream on Amazon Prime Video](#)

### 'Girl' (2018)

Navigating her gender dysphoria, a talented dancer enrolls at a prestigious ballet school to pursue her passion.

[Stream on Netflix](#)

### 'Hearts Beat Loud' (2018)

The summer before she leaves for college, a father and daughter form an unlikely songwriting duo.

[Stream on Peacock](#)

### 'Suspiria' (2018)

A nightmarish, ominous force swirls at the core of a renowned dance company, ensnaring all those who enter its doors.

[Stream on Amazon Prime Video](#)

### 'Booksmart' (2019)

Two bookish high schoolers are determined to fit four years' worth of fun into one night before they graduate.

[Rent or buy on Amazon Prime Video](#)

### 'The Farewell' (2019)

A Chinese American woman must keep a family secret during her cousin's impromptu wedding in China.

[Stream on Netflix](#)

### 'The Garden Left Behind' (2019)

A trans woman and her grandmother navigate life in New York City as undocumented immigrants from Mexico.

[Stream on Amazon Prime Video](#)

### 'Little Women' (2019)

Follow the story of the March Sisters, a family of women determined to live life on their own terms during the aftermath of the American Civil War.

[Stream on Hulu](#)

### 'Portrait of a Lady on Fire' (2019)

A French painter in the 18th century is commissioned to paint a wedding portrait of a woman before her nuptials, only to grow closer to her subject with each passing day.

[Stream on Hulu](#)

### 'Kajillionare' (2020)

An outsider's invitation to join her criminal parents in a major heist turns a woman's life upside down.

[Stream on Peacock](#)

### 'Miss Juneteenth' (2020)

A single mom, once a beauty queen herself, guides her rebellious teenage daughter in preparation for the Miss Juneteenth pageant.

[Stream on Netflix](#)

### 'Never Rarely Sometimes Always' (2020)

Two teenage girls from rural Pennsylvania set out for New York City to seek medical assistance following an unintended pregnancy.

[Stream on Peacock](#)

### 'Crush' (2022)

Pressured to join her high school track team, an aspiring artist seizes the chance to pursue her longtime crush, but finds herself falling for an unexpected teammate instead.

[Stream on Hulu](#)

### 'Saint Omer' (2022)

A novelist attending a criminal trial with the intention of crafting a modern-day adaptation of Medea finds her plans taking an unexpected turn as she questions her own judgments.

[Stream on Hulu](#)

### 'Poor Things' (2023)

Dive into the extraordinary story of a young woman brought back to life through the brilliant and unorthodox methods of a scientist she calls "God."

Coming soon to Hulu

Posted in [What to Watch](#)  
Tagged [Feminism](#), [Film Criticism](#), [LGBTQIA+](#)

## Cord-Cutting



Privacy Policy

Terms of Use

Accessibility

Do Not Sell/Share My Personal Information

Limit the Use of My Sensitive Personal Information

## Information

About Us

Contact

Careers

Editorial Guidelines

Press

Research

What to Watch

## Popular Pages

ESPN+

Hulu

Philo

Roku Streaming Devices

Sling TV

## Popular Guides

Find a Channel

How-tos and DIY

Compare Brands