

Specialist Writing Option C: Film Criticism
Ladybird: Greta Gerwig's White Feminism

(Excerpt) Adapted from 'Greta Gerwig and White Feminism in Film). Anita Kaul, 2021

I could never understand the appeal of *Lady Bird*. Granted, it was undeniably quirky, somewhat charming and at times humorous, but overall, I couldn't help identifying it as anything but extremely average. Why, then, was it being praised so highly? Critics hailed it as a revolutionary piece of feminist cinema. Audiences lauded its depiction of the "universal female experience". It was even nominated for an Academy Award for Best Picture. All I saw was whiteness. White cast, audience and critic — all united, flocking to rejoice over a glorified work of Western feminism.



Gerwig's American Dream seems to be White Picket Fences and White Female Faces

Whilst it would be unjust to overlook the successful cinematic aspects of *Lady Bird*, the film, like many other so-called feminist works of the 21st century, chronicles the hardships of white, bourgeoisie female adolescence without true concern for any other form of diversity. When minorities are included here (one gay character, two people of colour), they act solely as foils for the protagonist and her development.

From an aesthetic perspective though, the appeal of *Lady Bird* is evident. Gerwig employs softly-lit shots to convey the sense of rose-tinted nostalgia attached to the time period, and the film is suffused with a romantic tone of wistfulness and longing. Additionally, it must be mentioned that Gerwig's directorial debut features several quality performances, most notably those of Laurie Metcalfe and Tracy Letts. Furthermore, the **themes of female empowerment and solidarity are extremely prevalent within the film**, with Gerwig placing Lady Bird's relationships with her mother and best friend at the forefront of this work. However, **all these trailblazing characters are white**, with Gerwig ultimately supplying and prioritising one particular type of female perspective. It is undeniable that the sense of female solidarity is potent within Gerwig's films, **but the core implication is clear: this cinematic world of feminism is for white women & white women only.**

Sisterhood seems to only exist and be relevant when between white women. Year after year we witness coming-of-age feminist films and time after time the protagonist and the majority of their social circle is white. Throughout history, "feminist" films are dominated by white filmmakers, white characters and white narratives. From chick flicks (*Mean Girls*) to dramas (*Suffragette*) to LGBT films (*Carol*), any time a film is deemed progressive in terms of gender or even sexuality, the story is typically a racially exclusive one. This is why when a new film is hailed as a radical feminist work, we can usually expect it to be white-centric, with people of colour either serving as foils, or being excluded from the narrative altogether. A solution to this would be to diversify the industry itself, i.e. more ethnic female filmmakers, as more representation within the industry would directly equate to more representation on-screen, as well as providing an alternative and authentic perspective.