



**EnJourMe (English Journal of Merdeka):
Culture, Language, and Teaching of English**

Journal homepage: <http://jurnal.unmer.ac.id/index.php/enjourme/index>

Representation of Violence in Relationships in the Movie *It Ends With Us*: A Study of Contemporary Feminism

¹Anis Dwi Winarsih, ²Karlina Karadila Yustisia

^{1,2}D3 English Program, Faculty of Politics and Social Sciences, Universitas Merdeka Malang,

Jl. Terusan Raya Dieng No. 62-54 Malang, 65146, Indonesia

Corresponding author: karlina@unmer.ac.id

ARTICLE INFO

Received 19 December 2024

Accepted 25 December 2024

Available 31 December 2024

Keywords:

relationship violence,
contemporary feminism, media
representation, the movie *It Ends
With Us*

DOI: 10.26905/enjourme.v9i2.15094

How to cite this article (APA Style):

Winarsih, A. & Yustisia, K. (2024).
Representation of Violence in
Relationship in the Movie *It Ends
With Us*: A Study of Contemporary
Feminism. *EnJourMe (English
Journal of Merdeka): Culture,
Language, and Teaching of English*,
9(2) page 135-143, doi: 10.26905/
enjourme.v9i2.15094

ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the representation of violence in romantic relationships shown in the film *It Ends With Us* through the perspective of contemporary feminism. The focus of this study is how forms of violence, both physical and emotional, are represented and how the film reflects or challenges patriarchal values that are still dominant in interpersonal relationships. The research method used is textual analysis with a qualitative approach, referring to contemporary feminism theories that highlight issues of power, gender, and women's agency. The results show that the movie depicts relationship violence as a complex experience that is often wrapped up in the dynamics of love and forgiveness. Furthermore, the film features the main female character's struggle to redefine her position as an empowered individual in the midst of an oppressive situation. The findings make an important contribution to the discourse on critical awareness of gender-based violence in popular media and its relevance to contemporary feminist struggles.

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1. Introduction

Relationship violence is a complex and urgent social issue, given its significant impact on victims, physically, psychologically and emotionally. With these impacts, it can leave deep wounds for the victim. The existence of such violence can also disrupt the mental stability of the victim, affect the quality of life, and create a cycle of trauma that is difficult to break without proper intervention. Therefore, more serious attention from various parties is needed to prevent and deal with this issue comprehensively.

Violence as a form of social issue in a relationship is often difficult to recognize. This is because it is hidden behind the dynamics of love and personal relationships. Especially in the media, especially movies, which have an important role in representing and building public understanding of this issue. This statement is in accordance with the statement of Simatupang, et al (2024) which states that movies can influence public perception, both positive and negative, depending on how an event is portrayed.

The idea for a movie does not only come from the idea of a script writer or director, but sometimes it also comes from stories in novels. Novels are often a source of inspiration because they have structured storylines, strong characters, and deep themes. Many successful movies have been adapted from novels. These adaptations allow filmmakers to present a widely recognized story in a visual medium, giving the audience a new experience. Moreover, the process of novel-to-film adaptation often involves additional creativity, as not all elements in a novel can be translated directly to the big screen. This is related to the transformation from one form of work to another, which will certainly undergo changes because it has differences in the media used and each media also has its own conventions (Dzulfaroh.2018).

Therefore, the success of a film adaptation depends not only on the greatness of the novel's story, but also on the filmmaker's ability to bring the story to life in visual form. norms, stereotypes and power imbalances associated with gender roles (Siregar, 2023). The film *It Ends With Us*, adapted from the best-selling novel by Colleen Hoover, presents a narrative centered on the experiences of a woman trapped in a toxic relationship. The novel has been widely praised for its emotionally honest depiction of trauma, domestic violence, and an individual's struggle to break the cycle of violence. In the context of contemporary feminism, this story opens up a space for discussion on how gender-based violence can be represented authentically and meaningfully in popular media. Gender refers to the attribution of roles that are socially and culturally constructed, so that in a patriarchal culture, there is a concept that male dominance over women is natural, creating a narrative that women are weaker (inferior) social beings and must obey male orders (Leasa, 2019).

Gender-based violence against women often arises as a result of cultural roots that have long been deeply rooted in society. Women have a big role in maintaining and developing local wisdom so that it does not fade and remains rooted in the younger generation as cultural heirs of a community group (Inawati, 2014). Social norms that limit women's roles, stereotypes that attach weakness or incompetence to them, and power imbalances that favor men create an environment that allows this violence to continue. It is also related to gender, where gender plays an important role in current power dynamics, where women's roles are often represented by patriarchal norms that govern social life (A et al., 2025).

Such gender inequality not only affects the lives of individual women, but also impacts communities and the next generation. In addition, gender-based violence is often legitimized by legal and social structures that fail to provide adequate protection for victims. Therefore, collective efforts are needed to overhaul discriminatory norms and promote gender justice in all aspects of life.

Contemporary feminism offers a critical perspective on issues of gender injustice, including the normalization of relationship violence, which is often problematically represented in the media. This perspective acts as a critical lens that highlights how gender injustice not only occurs in real life but is

also perpetuated through various representations in the media. The normalization of violence in relationships, for example, is often shown as a normal part of romantic dynamics or conflict, obscuring its destructive nature. These representations not only diminish the experiences of victims but also reinforce harmful gender stereotypes, such as the notion that women must accept violence in order to maintain relationships. Violence is often influenced by social and cultural structures that discredit women's position, so many victims feel trapped in harmful relationships (Arrosich et.al, 2025).

Contemporary feminism challenges these narratives by raising public awareness, promoting alternative, more just discourses, and demanding accountability from the media industry. Through these critiques, feminism pushes for the changes needed to create representations that are more inclusive and respectful of human dignity.

The film *It Ends With Us* is very interesting to analyze because it presents a complex theme about the dynamics of violence in relationships and individual struggles against the cycle. An analysis of the film is useful to evaluate whether the representation is consistent with the values of feminism, such as equality, women's empowerment, and advocacy for victims of violence. By reviewing the characters, storyline, and moral messages conveyed, we can see the extent to which the film succeeds in reflecting the realities faced by victims of violence while providing inspiration for the audience. In addition, this analysis can also reveal whether the movie provides constructive solutions or reinforces harmful gender stereotypes.

However, the representation of relationship violence in the media is often contentious. Some works tend to normalize or even romanticize violence, while others seek to be a medium of education and advocacy. Therefore, it is important to explore how the film *It Ends With Us* interprets the issue of relationship violence, especially in relation to contemporary feminist values. This research aims to examine the representations of relationship violence presented in *It Ends With Us*, analyze whether these representations reflect the tenets of contemporary feminism, and understand their impact on audiences. Through this analysis, the research is expected to provide greater insight into the role of media in shaping public awareness and perspectives on the issue of gender-based violence.

2. Method

The approach used in this research is descriptive qualitative, with a study based on contemporary feminism theory. This approach aims to analyze the representation of violence in personal relationships and its implications for gender perspectives in films. The method used is textual analysis to identify, interpret, and evaluate narrative, visual, and dialog elements that depict violence in relationships in films.

Primary data sources in this research are excerpts of scenes, dialog, and narration in the film *It Ends With Us*. Secondary data is in the form of journal articles, books, or film criticism related to contemporary feminism theory. The data collection process in the research consists of three parts. First, film observation, which is done by watching the film in depth to note scenes that represent violence in relationships. Second, analytical notes, which is done by making detailed notes on visual elements, symbolism, and narrative relevant to the theme of contemporary feminism. Third, documentation, which was done by collecting movie reviews and critiques from academic and popular sources.

The data validation process in this study was conducted through source triangulation, which compares the results of the film analysis with the views of critics or academics in relevant literature. Therefore, this method allows the research to uncover the true meaning of the movie.

3. Results and discussion

Based on the analysis of the movie *It Ends With Us*, several forms of representation of violence in relationships that reflect contemporary feminism issues were found. The violence represented in this movie includes physical violence, emotional violence, structural violence, and responses to violence.

The movie explicitly shows a scene where the female character, Lily, experiences physical violence from her romantic partner, Ryle. Physical violence is committed by a person, person or individual that causes damage to a person's body (Sastra et al., 2025). In the movie *It Ends With Us* it is illustrated through actions such as punching and pushing, which often occur in situations of emotional conflict. Emotional abuse is shown through Ryle's manipulation, gaslighting, and attempts at control over Lily. For example, Ryle often undermines Lily's decisions or makes her feel guilty for the conflicts that occur in their relationship.

The structural violence in the film is depicted through Lily's limited access to seek support from the surrounding environment. Women are often limited to traditional roles and have little decision-making power (Fuady, 2024). The movie shows how societal norms tend to blame women for the failure of relationships, so Lily feels isolated and has difficulty making decisions to get out of violent situations. Lily's character represents the struggle of women in facing violence. It is depicted in the movie, that Lily takes decisive steps to end an unhealthy relationship despite facing various emotional and social barriers. This step reflects the feminist narrative of women's empowerment. Women's empowerment is proven by the fact that many women have also become actors who influence world change and even become leaders in a country (Talmullah et al., 2025).

Lily's response to Ryle's violence reflects the complexity of emotions and decisions often faced by victims of relationship violence. Lily, as the main character, undergoes a difficult emotional journey when facing Ryle's violent behavior. This can be seen from Lily's confusion and denial. Lily feels confused and tries to understand Ryle's behavior. She loves Ryle and hopes that his actions are just a momentary incident. This reflects how victims of violence often try to excuse or forgive their abusers, especially when the relationship has its good moments.

In fact, after several incidents of violence, Lily finally decides to take a stand. She chose to leave Ryle to protect herself and her child's future. It was a difficult decision for her to make, especially since she still loved Ryle, but she knew it was important to break the cycle of violence. The following are potential scenes that could represent contemporary feminism.

3.1 Gender Equality in *It Ends With Us* Movie

Gender equality in *It Ends With Us* is represented through various moments that depict women as individuals who are independent, strong, and able to make decisions for their own lives, despite being in difficult situations. Here are some representations of gender equality in *It Ends With Us*.

3.1.1 Lily's Economic Independence

The character of an independent character is represented that Lily opens a flower shop and runs it independently. This proves that she can stand on her own feet without depending on her partner or other people. This economic independence shows equality in terms of women's ability to contribute financially and run a business, equal to men. Here's a snippet of dialog from the movie that shows that Lily is a florist.

"I named it 'Lily Bloom's' because it's a combination of my name and something I love."

The naming of the flower shop reflects Lily's personal identity and her love for flowers. The character of Lily Bloom as a florist portrays a woman who is passionate, independent, and creative. This name shows how Lily sees her flower shop as an extension of herself and her hopes for the future. Moreover, Lily is known as someone who is attentive to customers. She gives flower recommendations based on the story or emotion she wants to convey.

3.1.2 Relationship Decision Making

Decision-making in this case highlights women's right to set boundaries in relationships, showing that love does not justify injustice or violence. In this movie, the character Lily decides to leave Ryle after he experiences violence, even though it means sacrificing the relationship she loves. Lily's decision to make the decision to stop the violence she is experiencing can be seen in her words to Ryle below.

"You can stop swimming now, Ryle. I want you to stop swimming."

Lily's decision is symbolic of contemporary feminism, where women are empowered to choose their own happiness and safety rather than being tied down in harmful relationships. Lily's decision to leave Ryle after he became violent is one of the most important moments in *It Ends With Us*. This decision reflects Lily's courage and strength to stop the cycle of violence despite her love for Ryle. Lily realizes that love is not enough to justify violence, and she chooses her emotional and physical well-being as the top priority. Therefore, this decision shows the importance of loving and valuing oneself more than maintaining an unhealthy relationship.

Moreover, Lily grew up witnessing domestic violence between her parents. She saw the impact it had on her mother and herself, which ultimately motivated her to break the chain. By leaving Ryle, Lily committed to not passing on the same trauma to her son.

3.1.3 Women's Solidarity

This solidarity shows the importance of cooperation between women in fighting for their rights, reflecting the principles of feminism and equality. In the film *It Ends with Us*, it is represented by the scene where Lily gets support from her mother and Alyssa (Ryle's sister). Her mother shares her past experience as a victim of domestic violence, while Alyssa supports Lily's decision to protect herself. Here is a snippet of dialog that shows the scene.

- Lily : *“Mom, how did you do it? How did you find the strength to leave dad?”*
- Lily’s mom : *“It wasn’t easy, Lily. I loved him, but I realized that love shouldn’t hurt. Leaving him wasn’t just for me, but also for you. I want you to know that you deserve better.”*
- Lily : *“I understand now. I have to do the same, for me and my son.”*

Lily’s mother shared how she felt trapped in an unhealthy relationship for years, and how she regretted not leaving Lily’s father sooner. Lily’s mother expressed her guilt for not protecting herself earlier, but ultimately she chose to leave Lily’s father for the well-being of herself and her children. Lily’s mother’s regret showed Lily that nothing is more important than one’s own safety and happiness. Lily learns the important lesson that stopping the cycle of violence is better than continuing to accept it and letting it ruin her life.

Lily’s mother reminded her that women deserve to feel safe and valued in relationships. She emphasized that if Lily stayed in an abusive relationship, it could have a negative impact on her child’s future. This message moved Lily to choose a better path for herself and her child. By continuing the abusive relationship, she felt she would be passing on the bad cycle to the next generation. The decision to end her relationship with Ryle was a step towards ensuring her son grew up in a safe and loving environment.

3.2 The Elimination of Violence In the Movie *It Ends With Us*

In *It Ends With Us*, Lily’s cessation of violence is a major theme that shows the importance of choosing personal happiness and safety, even if it means leaving someone we love. Lily’s decision to end the relationship with Ryle despite their love is a big step in stopping the cycle of violence, and the movie gives a strong message about female empowerment and the importance of healthy, respectful relationships.

When Ryle first physically abuses Lily, despite his love for her, Lily makes a firm decision to end the relationship. This is an important act in the elimination of violence, where she decides not to tolerate violent behavior, despite the deep emotional bond and love. Lily’s decision to leave Ryle sends a strong message that there is no valid reason to accept violence in relationships, even if it comes from people we love. This is the first step in stopping the violence in her life and preventing further violence from happening.

The decision to leave Ryle and end the violent relationship is an act of empowerment for Lily. It symbolizes that women have the right to choose their own happiness and safety, and asserts their right to live without violence. Lily can serve as an example to the audience that women can end the cycle of violence in their lives, and that loving relationships should not involve violence of any kind. This can be seen in the following dialog:

- Lily : *“I can’t believe you just did that.”*
- Ryle : *“Lily, I never meant to hurt you. I lost control, and I’m so sorry. Please, you have to understand-this won’t happen again.”*

- Lily : *“No, Ryle. You can’t do this to me. I can’t stay in a relationship where I’m afraid of you. You hurt me, and I won’t let that happen again.”*
- Ryle : *“I love you, Lily. You know I love you. Don’t let one mistake destroy everything we have.”*
- Lily : *“Love doesn’t hurt, Ryle. I’m not going to let you hurt me. I’m leaving.”*

This dialogue shows how Lily, despite loving Ryle dearly, cannot tolerate violence. Despite Ryle’s apology and remorse, Lily shows that love cannot justify violence. Lily’s decision to end the relationship is an important step in stopping the cycle of violence, given that she has witnessed her parents’ domestic violence. Lily chose not to sacrifice herself for the sake of a fearful relationship. Although filled with feelings and love, Lily’s decision to leave is an example of self-empowerment, which sends the message that no relationship is healthy if violence occurs, and women have the right to protect themselves.

One of Lily’s reasons for ending the relationship was to protect the child she was carrying. She realized that she did not want her child to grow up in an environment of violence and fear. This decision reflects her desire to ensure a better and safer future for her child, and to stop generations being trapped in a pattern of violence. After the violence occurred, Lily was emotionally and physically traumatized, but she sought to heal herself by leaving the dangerous relationship. Although it was a difficult decision, she understood that only by leaving Ryle could she free herself from fear and trauma. As such, Lily chose to focus on her recovery and mental health, and created space for herself to move on with her life.

3.3 Women Empowerment In the Movie *It Ends With Us*

Women define their own lives without pressure from traditional norms. Women’s empowerment in *It Ends With Us* is evident through the journey of the character Lily, who chooses to stop the cycle of violence in her relationship with Ryle. The decision to end an abusive relationship, prioritize the well-being of self and child, and gain support from fellow women is a powerful act of empowerment. The movie illustrates that women have the right to live in healthy, valued, and violence-free relationships, and that they can take control of their lives to create a better future.

One of the biggest moments of empowerment in *It Ends With Us* is Lily’s decision to leave Ryle after he physically abuses her. Although Lily loves Ryle dearly and there is a strong emotional bond, she chooses to end a relationship that is harmful to herself and the child she is carrying. This decision illustrates a woman’s empowerment in taking control of her life and choosing to protect herself and her future, even if it means giving up a deep love. This can be seen in the following dialog:

- Ryle : *“Lily, I love you. I’ll do anything to make things right. Just don’t leave me.”*
- Lily : *“Love doesn’t hurt, Ryle. If you really loved me, you would have never done this. I’m doing this for myself. I’m doing this for our baby. I can’t be with you anymore.”*
- Ryle : *“You can’t just walk away from this. From us.”*

Lily : *“I’m leaving because I deserve better. I deserve to be safe. I deserve to be happy. And so does our baby.”*

Lily, despite her confusion and heavy feelings, put herself and her unborn child first. She firmly says that she cannot remain in a violent and fearful relationship. The decision to leave Ryle is a form of self-empowerment, where Lily chooses to protect her safety and her future. In the dialog, Lily states clearly that she will not tolerate violence, even though she still loves Ryle very much. She knows that in order to have a better and safer life, she must let go of this destructive relationship. In fact, Lily firmly sets the boundary that healthy love does not involve violence, and she prioritizes her happiness and safety above all else. This is a powerful act of empowerment, where she chooses to no longer let violence rule her life.

Besides Lily, there are several other female characters in *It Ends With Us* who also portray women’s empowerment, although they have different roles in the story. one of them is Lily’s mother. She plays a very important role in supporting Lily’s decision to end the relationship with Ryle. Although she has long tried to cover up the emotional wounds she experienced due to domestic violence, she shares her personal experience with Lily. Lily’s mother empowered Lily by helping her realize that she did not have to accept the violence, and that she was not alone in facing this.

By sharing her experience, Lily’s mother provides emotional strength for her daughter. Women’s empowerment in this case is seen from her courage to open up about her past and tell Lily that she has the right to a better life, even though she has been a victim of violence. Lily’s mother also gives an example of how important it is to stop the cycle of violence in the family. Her bad experience taught her that women should protect themselves and not let their children grow up in a violent environment.

Another female character is Alyssa. She is the younger sister of Ryle. Although she is part of Ryle’s family, she shows female empowerment through her support of Lily’s decision to end the relationship. Alyssa knows that Ryle’s actions are wrong and clearly supports Lily’s decision to protect herself. Alyssa’s support shows that female empowerment can also come from fellow women who understand that self-protection and mental well-being are the most important things. Alyssa also shows empowerment by bravely supporting Lily’s choice even though it could cause tension in her family. By acting according to her principles and morals, Alyssa supports the right decision, even if it means going against her brother, Ryle. This is a form of empowerment in choosing to be on the side of truth and prioritizing Lily’s safety and happiness.

4. Conclusion

It Ends With Us depicts the reality of relationship violence, emphasizing one woman’s struggle to overcome an emotionally and physically abusive relationship. Through the perspective of contemporary feminism, the film highlights the importance of gender equality in building healthy and respectful relationships. The elimination of violence, especially in domestic relationships, is a heavily emphasized theme, with the main character struggling to break free from the cycle of violence. The film highlights the importance of social support, the courage to speak up, and access to resources to help victims of violence.

Ultimately, women's empowerment is at the core of the film's narrative, where women previously trapped in abusive relationships find the strength to break free and take control of their lives. This empowerment invites the audience to understand that every individual deserves to live free from violence and lead a dignified life, with respect for their rights and freedoms.

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