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## Misogyny and Sexism in Suffragette's Main Character: A Marxist Feminist Analysis

Rosyalina Nur Aprilyani<sup>1\*</sup>, Irma Rahmawati<sup>2</sup>

English Literature Study Program, Universitas Dian Nusantara<sup>1,2</sup>

Corresponding Author's Email: [311211055@mahasiswa.undira.ac.id](mailto:311211055@mahasiswa.undira.ac.id)

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### ABSTRACT

*This research analyzes the portrayal of misogyny and sexism in the film Suffragette (2015), directed by Sarah Gavron, through the lens of Marxist feminist theory. The analysis uses Silvia Federici's Marxist feminist theory, which sees that women's oppression is rooted not only in patriarchy but also in capitalist systems that exploit women's unpaid labor and social roles. The study focuses on the main character, Maud Watts who is a working-class woman, whose experiences reflect gender and class oppression in early 20th-century Britain. Using a qualitative method, the researcher identified 24 key scenes in the film. Nine of them represent sexism and 15 represent misogyny. The findings show that sexism is normalized through unequal labor conditions, domestic expectations, and legal marginalization, while misogyny emerges as punishment when women resist these roles, often through violence and institutional control. Maud's transformation from a passive worker to a politically active suffragette reveals the potential for collective resistance and highlights the importance of solidarity among women. The study concludes that Suffragette is not only a historical film but also as a powerful critique of ongoing gender and class inequalities.*

**Keywords:** Film analysis, gender oppression, Marxist feminism, misogyny, sexism, Suffragette.

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## INTRODUCTION

Sexism and misogyny are common in media and films. Misogyny can be defined as hatred or prejudice against women and can appear in both overt and covert forms including physical violence, objectification, and humiliation of women who are considered inferior to men (Srivastava et al., 2017). While a subcategory of prejudice, sexism is always over gender, often proselytizing the supremacy of male individuals over females (Lewis & Mar, 2022). In the media context, these two forces fuel the sustenance of patriarchal ideals, especially by packaging womanhood in very limited stereotyped roles. According to Feminist critics, such portrayals perpetuate stereotyping and perpetrate gender stereotyping by bringing in normalized gender violence and discrimination (Sarawathi, 2018).

One film that critically engages with these themes is *Suffragette* (2015), directed by Sarah Gavron. It addresses the problems of misogyny and sexism by picturing the battle for women's right to vote in Britain in the early twentieth century. I chose to analyze *Suffragette* through the lens of Marxist feminism, particularly using Silvia Federici's theory, because the film portrays how working-class women, like the main character Maud Watts, experience dual oppression: as women and as laborers. The film not only presents gender discrimination, but also reveals how capitalism exploits women's unpaid and underpaid labor. Federici (2012) argues that women's oppression is not merely cultural or legal, but is fundamentally tied to economic systems that rely on reproductive labor. This topic also reflects my personal experience working in male-dominated environments, where patriarchal attitudes are still deeply embedded. While previous researches have looked at the film from political or liberal feminist perspectives (Anarki & Yulistiyanti, 2023), few have explored it from a Marxist feminist view. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to show how the film criticizes the unfair systems that keep women in lower positions. This research is distinct in its use of Marxist feminism to uncover how the film critiques the capitalist roots of gender inequality.

## Research Questions and Objectives

This research aims to analyze how misogyny and sexism are represented in *Suffragette* (2015) through the female main character and the narrative structure, as well as how the main character resists and challenges these oppressive values. Specifically, the study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How are misogyny and sexism values represented in *Suffragette* (2015) through the female main character and narrative structure?
2. How does the female main character resist and challenge misogyny and sexism in the *Suffragette* (2015) movie?

## Scope and Significance of the Research

This research focuses on the *Suffragette* (2015) movie directed by Sarah Gavron, using it as the primary data for analysis. The study employs a qualitative method and is limited to examining how misogyny and sexism are portrayed through the character of Maud Watts. By applying Marxist feminist theory, this research aims to explore the forms of oppression faced by the main character and how she navigates challenges posed by both patriarchal and capitalist systems. The significance of this research lies in its contribution to the fields of feminism, film analysis, and literary studies. The findings are expected to offer meaningful insights into how visual narratives in film can serve as tools to address and critique gender-

based and political issues. Moreover, this study provides a clear framework for analyzing the representation of misogyny and sexism in film, which can be beneficial for future researchers interested in feminist criticism and film studies. It also offers a methodological reference for examining similar themes in other cinematic or literary texts, especially those related to gender inequality, women's emancipation, and historical feminist movements.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### *Marxist Feminism*

Marxist feminism critiques the traditional Marxist focus by revealing how capitalism relies on the unpaid, invisible labor performed by women. The household is also a site of labor exploitation. Federici argues that housework, childcare, emotional labor, and the reproduction of labor power are essential to sustaining capitalism, yet are either unpaid and undervalued (Federici, 2018). In Federici's work, *Caliban and the Witch* (2004), she traces the historical roots of capitalist development and argues that the transition from feudalism to capitalism was built not only on the exploitation of the working class, but also on the subjugation of women. The witch hunts in Europe were part of a broader strategy to discipline female bodies, enforce reproductive roles, and remove women from control over communal lands and knowledge systems (Federici, 2004). She argues that domestic and reproductive labor of women are central to capitalist production.

In literature analysis, Federici's ideas offer a framework to analyze how female characters are positioned within systems that marginalize their labor. Literature often reflects and challenges these dynamics, portraying women confined to reproductive roles or struggling within underpaid labor sectors. Through analysis of characters, plot, and themes, literary works can show how capitalist economies depend on the commodification of women's bodies and work (Federici, 2018). In understanding Marxist feminist critique, it is possible to examine how characters, or more often women, react to and transgress economic and social oppression, destabilize the dominant order, speculate about the conditions of liberation and change. The focuses of this research are misogyny and sexism.

Federici argues that misogyny functions in capitalism through systemic and often brutal violence. Her historical research on the European witch hunts (15th-17th centuries) reveals how approximately 100,000 women were tortured and executed as part of a deliberate campaign to destroy female autonomy and communal knowledge (Federici, 2004). This terror eliminated midwives and healers who controlled reproduction and enforced patriarchal marriage structures. Violence disciplines women into accepting their assigned roles in the capitalist order. The example includes punishing those who resist while deterring others from challenging the status quo. The threat and reality of misogynist violence maintains what Federici calls the "patriarchy of the wage," which is the system where women's economic dependence on male wages reinforces gendered hierarchies in both workplace and home (Federici, 2012). Silvia Federici argues that sexism is built into capitalism. She shows how stereotypes about women's work keep labor cheap or unpaid (Federici, 2004).

Several previous studies have used Silvia Federici's Marxist feminist theory to explore how capitalism and patriarchy intersect in film. Herbert (2017) analyzed Mexican films to show how women's roles as mothers or sex workers serve both the state and capitalist systems. Al-Almusawi and Al-

Dihaymawrr (2024) examined *The Queen's Gambit*, focusing on female success in a male-dominated field. Liu (2024) critiqued *Barbie* (2023) for promoting a consumerist idea of empowerment that ignores women's labor. Wohl (2019) explored the burden of triple-day labor in *Manos*, while Adami and Fletcher (2017) studied how unpaid domestic labor in experimental films supports capitalism. While these studies offer important insights, none of them apply Federici's theory to *Suffragette* (2015). Previous research on *Suffragette* mostly uses liberal feminism and overlooks how the film connects gender oppression to economic structures. This research fills that gap by using Federici's Marxist feminism to analyze how the film represents sexism and misogyny as tools of both patriarchy and capitalism, especially through its narrative structure and character development.

## METHODS OF RESEARCH

This research employs a qualitative research method. According to Oranga and Audrey (2023), qualitative research is used to establish a deep understanding of a phenomenon with the help of textual or even visual data. This method is fitting for a close examination of how misogyny and sexism are realized in the main character of *Suffragette* (2015) forgoing an analysis of the broader narrative and structural elements of the film, this method can focus on an interpretive examination of the character's experiences and interactions within this socio-political space. The movie is analyzed through its narrative, characters, and dialogues, particularly focusing on the character of Maud Watts. No human participants or respondents were involved in this study.

### Instruments

The researcher collected information from the film *Suffragette* released in 2015, directed by Sarah Gavron and the script was written by Abi Morgan. This feature film lasts approximately 106 minutes and uses some of the most famous actors including Carey Mulligan as Maud Watts, Helena Bonham Carter as Edith Ellyn, and Meryl Streep making a cameo as Emmeline Pankhurst. Being a melodrama the movie deals with the issues of class, gender, and labor demonstrating the fight for suffrage of working-class women in Britain of the early twentieth century. Its core story revolves around a laundry woman, Maud Watts, who gets drawn into the suffragette movement, and who struggles against male chauvinism, discrimination against women and class prejudice on her path toward becoming a militant.

The primary data in this research consists of selected scenes, dialogues, and visual elements from the film *Suffragette* (2015), directed by Sarah Gavron. These specific components are examined to explore how misogyny, sexism, and class oppression are represented through the film's narrative and character development. The analysis centers on the character Maud Watts and her experiences within the socio-political landscape of early 20th-century Britain. By interpreting cinematic elements that illustrate gender-based discrimination, economic exploitation, and institutional authority, the study identifies key patterns of oppression. These findings are then analyzed through the lens of Marxist feminist theory, particularly Silvia Federici's framework, to reveal the influence of patriarchal and capitalist systems on the protagonist's life and resistance. Narrative elements such as plot, setting, character representation, and symbolism serve as the basis for this critical analysis.

## Procedures

The data collection is done through close readings and use of critical theory as the data collection guide. This research follows Herbert (2017) who also uses close reading to analyze how films represent political issues like reproductive labor and biopolitics. It looks not only at what is shown, but how it is shown. This includes specific scenes, character interactions, dialogue, editing, sound, and mise en scène. In this research, data collection focuses on scenes that portray misogyny and sexism in the protagonist's journey. These scenes are studied to understand how films can both reflect and challenge power and gender roles. Similar to this is Strauss's strategies of analysis that follow the close reading (Strauss, 1987, as cited in Maxwell and Chmiel, 2014).

1. Watching the Film
2. Re-watching the Film
3. Identifying Key Elements
4. Selecting and Categorizing Data

## Data Analysis

According to Strauss (1987), qualitative research is useful when we want to explore how people make sense of experiences, symbols, and actions. It allows the researcher to look deeply into specific cases and find patterns, themes, and meanings. Since this research analyzes how films show sexism and power through dialogue, visuals, and character behavior, a qualitative approach is the most suitable. This research focuses on finding meaning in the details and understanding how the film's structure and style shape its message. Therefore, this research uses qualitative analysis methods to answer the research questions in detail.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The movie *Suffragette* (2015) shows many scenes where the main character, Maud Watts, experiences sexism and misogyny attitudes in her daily life. There are a total of 24 scenes identified that contain sexism and misogyny that are experienced by Maud. Out of these, 9 scenes involve sexism, while 15 scenes involve misogyny. These scenes were selected based on Maud's personal experiences throughout the narrative and the scenes include interactions at home, at work, and with authorities.

### The Representation of Sexism and Misogyny in *Suffragette*

To answer the first research questions, this research finds that sexism and misogyny are tools used by the capitalist and patriarchal system in the film to keep women in a lower position than men. This lower status is made to look normal and acceptable in society. The system uses these two tools in different ways when it comes to Maud. Sexism is used to build and spread social rules that women like Maud are expected to follow.

**Table 1.** Number of Sexism and Misogyny scenes found in the film.

Scenes	Frequency
Representation of Sexism	9
Representation of Misogyny	15

Resistance toward Sexism	4
Resistance toward Misogyny	7

**Table 2.** Scenes of Sexism, Misogyny, and Resistance in Suffragette (2015)

Represent	Scene	Findings	Analysis
Sexism	Laundry work task	“Deliveries should have picked it up.”	Gendered labor division; Maud is expected to take on men's work without protest.
Sexism	Wage testimony	“We get 13 shillings a week, sir. For a man, it's 19.”	Reveals institutionalized pay gap and gender-based labor exploitation.
Sexism	Domestic burden	Maud works more but still does all housework.	Illustrates double burden of labor for women at work and home.
Sexism	Inspector Steed about husband	“Would you like me to contact your husband?”	Shows assumption that husband controls wife's decisions.
Sexism	Opening voice-over	“Women lack the calmness... to exercise judgment.”	Narrates belief in natural inferiority of women for public life.
Sexism	Mrs. Haughton denied bail	“You're my wife. You'll act like a wife.”	Men exert legal and financial control over wives.
Sexism	Maud's absence	Sonny gets neighbor to cook.	Shows how domestic roles are expected of women alone.
Sexism	Sonny dresses George poorly	George still in nightshirt	Reveals neglect of fatherly role; reinforces mother's sole responsibility.
Sexism	Mr. Taylor to Mrs. Miller	“Leave the vote to us men.”	Defines voting as male domain; home as women's.
Misogyny	Police attack protestors	Women beaten despite peaceful protest.	Violence is used to silence political resistance.
Misogyny	Maud hit and dragged	Maud struck by officer on horseback.	Brutality to suppress rebellion.
Misogyny	Forced prison strip	Women stripped on entry.	Violation of bodily autonomy as punishment.
Misogyny	Force-feeding scene	Maud screams 'No!'	Graphic control over women's bodies.
Misogyny	Sonny locks out Maud	“You won't shame me like that again.”	Emotional punishment for rebellion.
Misogyny	Loses custody	Son given for adoption without consent.	State and family use motherhood to control women.
Misogyny	Mr. Taylor's harassment	“She reminds me of you at that age.”	Pattern of sexual abuse; normalized silence.



Misogyny	Touch and whisper	“After everything I’ve done for you.”	Sexual manipulation through power and guilt.
Misogyny	Maud saves Maggie	No dialogue; understanding look.	Harassment implied; silence as survival.
Misogyny	Sonny insults Mrs. Haughton	“On her high horse again.”	Dismissive attitude toward women’s rights.
Misogyny	Workmates to Sonny	“Your wife is a disgrace.”	Shaming men through their wives’ actions.
Misogyny	Men discussing riot	“These damn women...”	Women’s political acts met with scorn.
Misogyny	Steed’s comment	“You women cleaned up well.”	Casual demeaning of women’s appearance.
Misogyny	Sonny on daughter’s life	“Same as yours.”	Accepts women’s suffering as normal.
Misogyny	George quotes Sonny	“Dad says you’re not well.”	Patriarchal beliefs passed to children.
Resistance to Sexism	Parliament testimony	Maud speaks about pay gap.	Her first public act of challenging the norm.
Resistance to Sexism	Defying domestic role	“I’m not just that anymore.”	Maud refuses to be only a wife.
Resistance to Sexism	Correcting George	“That’s not true, George.”	Counters Sonny’s influence over their son.
Resistance to Sexism	Joining suffragette meeting	Attends after Sonny’s sexist remark.	Chooses activism over silence.
Resistance to Misogyny	Hitting Mr. Taylor	Hits his hand with hot iron.	Physical resistance against abuse.
Resistance to Misogyny	Rejecting Steed’s offer	Sends letter declining help.	Asserts independence and commitment to cause.
Resistance to Misogyny	Confronting Steed	“Who gives you the right...?”	Full verbal defiance to state power.
Resistance to Misogyny	Force-feeding	Maud thrashes, kicks, screams.	Resists bodily control even under restraint.
Resistance to Misogyny	Losing George	Screams and hits Sonny.	Emotional and physical protest against punishment.
Resistance to Misogyny	Saving Maggie	Silent exchange with Mrs. Haughton.	Protects others from repeated abuse.
Resistance to Misogyny	Staying in movement	Refuses to quit after trauma.	Endures and resists through ongoing commitment.

### Sexism

Gavron illustrates how sexism serves as the norm in a capitalist society. It is normal and questioning the norm is a crime. Sexism is used as a tool to make women believe that their position of being lower than men is natural. It is used throughout the film, again and again, and all women, including Maud, experience sexist treatment in all environments, both when working and at home. Men in higher positions used the sexism ideology to put women in a disadvantageous position and justify their exploitation. Even at first,

Maud is not aware that she is siding with the suffragettes and that she has no position to give her opinion. She runs away and tries to escape the chaotic events happening on the street in the early parts of the film because she sees it as an event clashing with society's norm. The forms of sexism present in the film can be seen from the unequal treatment between the two sexes and the sexist comments happening in both environment, industrial and household settings.

Society, in this case is a patriarchal society, has a fixed social structure that should not be broken. That fixed structure is that women can not vote, reinforced by the idea that they lack judgement by nature. If women are given the right to vote, it will lead to even more rebellious movements to take down the society as a whole. The narrator continues by listing the occupations that have power to decide a country's future such as MPs, cabinet ministers, and judges. The male narrator is afraid that women are allowed to occupy mentioned positions in the future. The use of the verb 'demand' shows that women are rebellious and demanding. Instead of using 'demand', using the verb 'ask' or 'request' will put women in a more neutral position. It is also mentioned that women are represented, as if their voices have always been heard in a government's decision and that the men, who have better judgement by nature, can filter out the opinion of their daughters, wives, sisters whose raw opinions can never be trusted.

Another sexist language can be seen in the usage of the words 'wife' and 'husband.' They are not simply terms referring to a person's relationship with each other in which they are tied by bond, and acknowledged by a government to be a family. In the film and capitalist society, the usage of both terms suggest the idea that the husband owns the wife, and that a wife is a commodity to a husband. Wife is seen as a commodity and the usage of the word clearly shows it. A wife has to know that their position is lower than a husband. Sonny, who initially seems sympathetic with her out of love, eventually resorts to a sexist language. Still, Maud's value in Sonny's eyes is tied to her obedience. When Maud starts expressing her opinions, he calls Maud as his wife to justify his opinion that Maud has to listen and obey everything that he tells her to do. It does not happen within Maud's home, it happens everywhere. Another figure using sexist language towards Maud is Inspector Steed. In his opinion, women are only home for leisure activities. The usage of 'for tea,' indicates that he sees women doing all the unpaid labor work at home as a leisure activity and that women have it less stressful and tiring than men which justifies men's violence and oppression of them. It is followed by his threats to call Sonny for her protests and in doing so, he uses the words 'your husband.' Another usage can be seen after the officers' crashing on Mrs. Pankhurst's speech. They capture several women and instead of bringing the suffragettes straight to prison, Inspector Steed suggests letting them go back to 'their husband' to deal with the suffragettes. First, it is a husband's responsibility to take care and make their wife obedient to society's rules. If a woman is rebellious, it is her husband's fault. It leads to husbands being violent at home to control women and stop them from being judged by society. Finally, after complying with society's norm of a husband and a wife, Maud realizes that something is wrong. Indeed, her first idea of a society's norm comes from her husband and she has been living under Sonny's control and sexist ideology, just like the norm, until she meets fellow suffragettes. Again, she uses the word 'my husband' to show that she trusts his husband and gets the ideology from him at first, as well as the government. Finally, she realizes that it was wrong

Even with women who have her own money, they can not escape the sexist language. Being women is the sole reason for sexist treatment. It happens with Mrs. Haughton. She wants to bail all the suffragettes with her own money but her husband, Mr. Haughton refuses. It only requires Mr. Haughton to sign because



women's signature does not worth anything. However, he refuses. The justification, of course, is that Mrs. Haughton is his wife, and she has to obey, again with the 'wife' and 'husband' usages. Mr. Haughton sees his wife's involvement in suffragette movement as a plaything, a game played during boring and free time. It is not a real case and he only follows what his wife asks just for fun.

Sexism cannot be separated from class exploitation. Maud, as a working-class woman, faces dual oppression, economic and gendered. Maud receives low wages and unsafe work conditions. In contrast, middle and upper-class women, like Mrs. Haughton benefited a little. Still, she has to face the same discrimination, even from her own husband. It is evident in the film that sexism in capitalist society happens across all classes. Even with the bourgeois, the woman's money is not theirs, but their husbands'. The suffragettes' tactics of window-smashing, bombings, and public protests, challenge the traditional stereotypes that women should be quiet and compliant. Maud's transformation from a worker to an activist shows that women's resistance is revolutionary. It disrupts capitalism's reliance on their unpaid and exploited labor. The backlash against the suffragettes shows that the state enforces gender norms through violence when women refuse to conform, which leads to the next topic of this research, that is misogyny.

### **Misogyny**

The film's clear depictions of misogyny first comes with acts of violence committed by the government, particularly against suffragettes who dare to challenge the upper positions. During the first protest after hearing Parliament's announcement of rejecting the rights to vote for women, the women only scream. They chant in solidarity in the hope that the government will hear. They do not resort to violence at all. However, it turns into chaos when one of the police officers punches one of the suffragettes. The police response is violent even though the suffragettes remain non-violent. Officers punch, kick, and drag women through the streets. The audience is presented with clear shots of bloodied faces of suffragettes. The police officers experience no harm because the suffragettes clearly do not have any weapon, unlike the officers who use their sticks. That violence is a tactic used by the government to avoid future resistance. Maud also experiences it even though she only attempts to run away. When an officer riding a horse reaches her, he hits her with a police stick. Still hurting on her head, she is dragged onto the car. Violence is the only solution to silence women.

Three times being sent to prison, Maud receives increasing violence actions for each time. The prison scenes show how imprisonment is weaponized against women. The forced stripping of inmates serves to break their spirit by violating bodily autonomy (34:05). The force-feeding scene (01:18:52) is terrifying. As a result of the suffragette's not so harmful protest of not eating for five days straight, a police officer, male, angrily approaches her. With the help of troubled female workers, Maud is pinned down as a tube is shoved into her nose. The female guard's pained expression during the procedure shows how patriarchy makes women enforce misogyny upon each other whether they want to do it or not. If they do not do it, then they are the ones who are going to receive it. Even Inspector Steed is shocked by the prison's method of disciplining women and does not agree. At first, it seems that he genuinely cares. Turns out he worries that the suffragettes will die for martyrdom which is considered as heroic and Steed does not want that. Again, it is misogynistic and the hatred is used to justify the violence done to them. The government tries to make Maud feel small and powerless. A man says to her, "*Do you think anyone listens to a girl like you? You're nothing in the world.*" (55:09) This line shows how women, especially working-class women like

Maud, are seen as unimportant and are expected to stay silent. It is not just a personal insult. Instead, it reflects how society views women as having no voice or value in public matters. This kind of statement is a way to control and discourage women from speaking up or fighting for their rights.

Misogynistic violence does not happen only in the government and prison. It happens in domestic settings as well. Initially, Sonny appears gentle, bandaging Maud's cuts (05:48). But when she defies him, his "care" becomes rage. He locks her out of the house (38:36), gives away their son for adoption without discussing (01:09:30), and snarls, *"You won't ever shame me like that again"* (39:46). Indeed, his violence is not physical but emotional. Sonny can not hurt Maud for unclear reasons, but he clearly performs misogynistic acts toward her through psychological actions. The ultimate punishment for Maud's defiance is losing custody of her son (01:09:30). Motherhood is capitalism's leverage over women. The state and the husbands force compliance by using the women's children. According to Sonny, his decision to give George away is not cruelty but for George's own good since Maud is too focused on the movement. It is hinted that Sonny tries to suppress his emotion and he truly loves Maud and George which can be seen from his expression and him not being extremely violent such as beating Maud. Thus, Sonny is the victim of the patriarchal society, too. Still, he cares more about maintaining his position within society than his wife. He fears being ashamed rather than assuring his wife's own safety. At work, his workmates say, *"Oi. Your wife is a fucking disgrace, Sonny. You should be keeping her under control"* (34:51). His hatred towards women wins over his love for Maud.

While violence is used to discipline women, sexual harassment is used to control them. Women have to face sexual harassment at work. Maud's workplace is considered as a safe place for sexual predators because the action itself comes directly from her employer, Mr. Taylor. The audience is first presented with this action that happened to Miller's daughter, Maggie (14:48). Maggie shows refusal but Mr. Taylor continues by saying, *"You know who I like"* (14:54), indicating that that moment is not the first time the harassment took place. Maud sees the scene and is shocked. Yet, she does not scream for help and does not even tell Miller about the situation. Silence is expected. After that, Maud is approached by Mr. Taylor who says, *"She reminds me of you at that age"* (15:50). It is implied that Maud as a child was his previous victim. He did the same thing to Maud when she was around Maggie's age. Later on, this inappropriateness is presented again (53:36). After showing Mrs. Pankhurst in the newspaper, Mr. Taylor tries to control and dominate Maud by touching her inappropriately and whispering just 2 cm away from Maud's ear, *"After everything I've done for you"* (53:42). Clearly, Maud has been the victim of sexual harassment since she was a child. She has to work, an inheritance from her mother who also worked there, for the same laundry. Sexual harassment functions as a tool of control under capitalism.

Finally, hatred expressions and speech towards women exist to justify the previous violence and sexual harassment. This exists within both home and workplace. When Maud first discusses Mrs. Haughton's speech of wanting women to vote, Sonny replies with a misogynistic response towards her. Sonny mentioning Mrs. Haughton as 'on her high horse' means that he thinks she is arrogant and acts like she is superior. Even though Sonny does not explicitly show his hatred towards women, this reply indicates his misogynistic attitude. Maud works at the same place as him, working more hours. Realistically, Maud getting more paycheck will help the house's economy much better. However, he clearly thinks women should not get paid more than men and it is just a natural thing.

The oppression of women in the film is not simply about misogyny nor sexism alone, but the

necessity of women's subordination for capitalism's survival. The state, the family, the workplace, and even language become mechanisms through which women are kept in place to maintain the existing socio-economic order. The state's brutal response to peaceful protests, the weaponization of imprisonment and motherhood, and the normalization of domestic abuse all point to a deeper economic structure that depends on the subjugation of women. Even emotional labor, such as maternal attachment, becomes a tool of coercion when Maud loses her son as punishment for her activism. Resistance, as shown by Maud and her fellow suffragettes, is therefore not only political but deeply economic, challenging the very foundations of capitalist patriarchy.

### Resistance to Sexism and Misogyny in *Suffragette*

In the film, Maud does not consistently resist the sexist and misogynistic attitudes directed toward her. Throughout the film, she resists 11 of the 24 misogynistic and sexist experiences she encounters. Her resistance develops gradually in response to the oppression she faces at work, domestic, and from authorities.

In early scenes, Maud shows little to no resistance. In the first scene shown of sexism, when Mr. Taylor forces Maud to deliver a laundry load typically assigned to men, she initially questions the order by saying *"Deliveries should have picked it up"* (03:00). Still, she does not pursue the claim and ultimately complies. Maud also shows no resistance even after working long hours at the laundry and still performing domestic duties at home. Despite the clear injustice, she remains silent. However, resistance begins to emerge subtly when Maud gives public testimony about wage inequality (21:46). Nonetheless, this marks her first clear act of resistance and signals the beginning of her political awareness.

Even though she is confident in her choice of fighting, she still hesitates and easily goes back to her old self after getting arrested. After being questioned at the police station, Inspector Steed asks, *"Would you like me to contact your husband, Mrs. Watts?"* (32:00). She merely shakes her head and clearly denies being a suffragette. She avoids eye contact rather than responding verbally. It is not until her personal identity is directly challenged at home that she begins to voice her resistance more clearly. Sonny tells her, *"You're a wife. My wife. That's what you're meant to be"* (48:43). Maud replies, *"I'm not just that anymore"* (48:47). It is the first time she directly resists the domestic ideology imposed on her. Later, when her son tells her, *"Dad says you're not well in the head"* (59:58), she gently corrects him, *"That's not true, George"* (01:00:04). Though gentle, this response still represents a form of resistance. She wants her son to know the truth and counter the narrative told by her husband.

Towards 15 misogynistic experiences, Maud resists 7 of them. Similar to resistance toward sexist attitudes, Maud also shows no resistance at all in the beginning of the film. Maud's response to misogynistic comments is characterized by silence and endurance. When Mr. Taylor comments that Violet reminds him of Maud *"at that age"* (15:50), she shows no resistance to sexual objectification. Maud's silence in early scenes reflects the internalized belief that such harassment is not worth confronting. This pattern of passive endurance continues in several moments involving government violence. When Maud is trampled by a horse during a protest, she shows no verbal protest, and the assault goes unpunished. A similar lack of resistance is also seen where women political prisoners are forced to strip. Maud's quiet *"Please"* shows both fear and submission. She does not fully resist and confront.

However, by the middle of the movie, a shift occurs. When told by Sonny that her daughter would

end up like her, Maud proceeds to attend a suffragette meeting that night (43:41). This is a clear resistance. She begins to choose political engagement over domestic compliance. This is further demonstrated when Mr. Taylor confronts her by saying, “*After everything I’ve done for you*” (53:42). Maud finally retaliates by hitting his hand with a burning iron (53:51). This moment is a clear, physical resistance. She is not afraid of showing resistance in the middle of the workforce.

Verbal resistance also becomes more deliberate. when Inspector Steed mentions that girls will never be heard. Maud does not respond immediately. Although Maud does not immediately respond when Inspector Steed tells her that no one listens to “*a girl like you*” (55:09), she later sends him a letter rejecting his offer and affirming her commitment to the suffragette movement (01:01:56). This delayed but deliberate resistance shows that Maud’s ability to assert herself is growing. She begins to refuse accepting control of other people over herself. It also happens when Inspector Steed says, “*You women cleaned yourselves up well,*” Maud confronts him by saying, “*Who gives you the right to stand in the middle of a riot and watch women beaten and do nothing?*” (01:15:45). This is Maud’s fullest verbal expression of resistance. She no longer asks or pleads but rather, she demands accountability.

Maud’s resistance towards misogynistic attitudes is also physical. When she is forced to eat with a tube in the prison, she shows clear resistance by kicking, thrashing, and screaming “*No.*” Physical resistance is also shown when she loses custody of her son. Maud screams and hits Sonny. By the middle of the film, Maud is no longer passively enduring injustice. In conclusion, *Suffragette* presents Maud Watts’ resistance to sexism and misogyny as a gradual and deeply personal process. Early in the film, Maud’s silence shows how structural misogyny teaches women to endure rather than oppose. She fully follows this. However, as her awareness of injustice deepens through lived experiences, she begins to resist. At first, it is done through quiet refusals, then through verbal and physical resistance.

## Film Analysis

### Cinematography

*Suffragette* uses visual elements to reflect the emotional and political growth of its main character. Close-up shots of Maud’s face during moments of exhaustion, trauma, and decision-making allow the audience to witness her inner transformation. These shots create empathy and highlight her personal struggle. Medium shots are used in protest and public scenes to show chaos and violence, while still focusing on key moments, such as police brutality and the climactic Derby scene. Long shots help place Maud within larger oppressive environments. Lighting also plays a crucial role. Cold, blue tones dominate the film, suggesting the harshness of the time. Warm lighting appears only in spaces where Maud feels safe, such as her home early in the film or the room offered by Violet. As Maud loses her family and shelter, this warmth disappears, symbolizing her shift from private comfort to public resistance.

### Soundtrack

The film uses sound to support its message of oppression and resistance. Silence is employed effectively in emotional scenes, especially during Emily’s death at the Derby. This lack of music forces the audience to focus on the actions and consequences rather than emotional manipulation. Natural sounds, such as breaking glass or police batons, emphasize the physical reality of protest. The restrained use of soundtrack draws attention to Maud’s experiences and immerses the viewer in the violence and tension of

her world.

### ***Symbolism***

The film includes several symbolic elements to enhance its Marxist feminist themes. A broken window early in the film represents Maud's first break from societal norms. Her wedding ring symbolizes domestic expectations; removing it marks her full commitment to the movement. The book titled *Dreams*, passed from suffragette to suffragette, represents shared knowledge and collective struggle. These symbols connect personal resistance to broader political change.

### **Analysis of Narrative Elements**

#### ***Setting***

The film's setting highlights intersections between gender, class, and labor. The laundry factory reflects unsafe, exploitative conditions for women, while Maud's home, once a place of warmth, becomes a space of emotional control. The prison represents direct state control over women's bodies. Public areas such as Parliament or the Derby become battlegrounds for visibility and voice. The Derby race, filled with elites and state power, contrasts with earlier settings and becomes a symbolic space of disruption and sacrifice.

#### ***Theme***

The film centers on themes of systemic violence, female solidarity, and collective resistance. It shows that women's activism is rooted not in abstract ideas but in daily experiences of exploitation. Maud's journey reveals how political awareness grows through exposure to injustice and the support of other women. Violence from the state is normalized, but solidarity among women becomes a form of survival and empowerment. The film also recognizes class differences while showing how women across backgrounds find common cause.

#### ***Character***

Maud Watts, begins as an obedient worker and mother, unaware of systemic injustice. Her transformation comes not from ideology but from repeated experiences of exploitation, loss, and witnessing others' suffering. Her resistance is driven by care—she does not want her son or other girls to suffer as she has. Her story shows that political change can emerge from personal pain and ethical responsibility.

#### ***Point of View***

The film uses a limited third-person point of view centered on Maud. This approach allows the audience to experience the world through her eyes, highlighting how ordinary working-class women become politicized. Although this limits access to broader suffragette strategy, it aligns with the film's purpose: to show how resistance grows from everyday life, not just from leadership or ideology.

## **CONCLUSION**

This research explores how misogyny and sexism are portrayed in the film *Suffragette* (2015)

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*Misogyny and Sexism in Suffragette's Main Character:*

*A Marxist Feminist Analysis*

**(Nur Aprilyani, et al.**



through the lens of Marxist feminist theory, focusing on the experiences of the main character, Maud Watts. The film presents a powerful depiction of how gender and class oppression work together to silence and control women, especially during the British suffrage movement. A total of 24 scenes were identified where Maud directly experiences gender-based oppression—nine depicting sexism and fifteen showing misogyny. Sexism is shown as something normalized in society, where women like Maud are expected to work harder for less pay, remain silent, and serve men both at work and at home. Misogyny emerges when women resist these roles, often through violence, emotional abuse, and punishment. Maud is harassed by her employer, unsupported by her husband, and repeatedly punished for speaking out. Her arrest, force-feeding, and loss of custody over her son demonstrate how misogyny functions as a tool of fear and control within a patriarchal capitalist system. While sexism enforces the belief that women should accept their inferior roles, misogyny violently suppresses any attempt to resist that belief. Together, they maintain a structure where women's unpaid labor and obedience are exploited for the benefit of society's dominant powers.

As Maud begins to question her role and sees the injustices around her, she undergoes a powerful transformation. Initially, she is a tired worker trying to survive, but through exposure to the suffragette movement and its collective strength, she begins to resist. Her personal awakening becomes part of a broader political struggle as she joins with other women to fight back against systemic oppression. The film not only portrays her emotional and physical journey but also uses cinematic techniques—such as close-ups, lighting, silence, and symbolism—to connect viewers to her experiences. Objects like broken glass, a wedding ring, and a passed book act as visual metaphors for awakening, freedom, and shared resistance. The film ends by connecting Maud's fictional story to real historical events, reminding audiences that the fight for gender equality is ongoing. Ultimately, *Suffragette* shows that oppression is structural, not individual, and that true change requires awareness, solidarity, and collective action.

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