

# The Right to Laugh: On Sensual Pleasure and the Transformation of Viewing Structures in Feminist Light Comedies - Taking the Film *Herstory* as an Example

Jiang Jingjing

*National University of Singapore, Singapore*

**Abstract:** This paper examines director Shao Yihui's movie *Herstory* (2024) to explore how feminist light comedies in contemporary contexts generate sensory pleasure through humor while subtly reconfiguring gender positions during viewing. Unlike previous feminist cinema reliant on revenge narratives or intense confrontation, this movie transforms the recurring "speechless moments" in women's daily lives into satirical punchlines through dialog, characterization, and situational design. This enables audiences to derive pleasure and psychological advantage through recognition and empathy. The study focuses on three research questions: Firstly, how does *Herstory* stimulate empathetic pleasure among female audiences at the script level? Second, how this pleasure subtly challenges mainstream viewing logic; Third, whether the movie, within its light comedy framework, proposes new imaginings and practical possibilities for female audiences regarding gendered existence. Theoretically, this study integrates feminist film theory, affective politics, and research on female humor, employing textual analysis and audience reception case studies methodologically. By examining the film's caricatured portrayal of patriarchal figures, its distillation and playful subversion of female experiences, and the formation of the "female gaze" alongside emotional complicity, this paper argues that the "right to laugh" transcends mere emotional release. It constitutes a non-confrontational micro-political practice that, through laughter, temporarily loosens viewing structures and enacts a mild redistribution of gendered power. This approach thus charts a novel critical trajectory for feminist filmmaking.

**Keywords:** Feminism; Light Comedy; Sensory Pleasure; Viewing Structure; Female Gaze; Affective Politics; *Herstory*

## 1. Introduction

In recent years, as feminist issues have gained widespread traction within public cultural spaces, female-centered visual works have increasingly attained visibility within mainstream discourses. Such productions often dramatize experiences of gender oppression, offering female audiences' emotional outlets for identification and mechanisms for affective compensation. However, academic circles have also questioned the prevalent "revenge narratives" or expressions of "emotional triumph" within these works, arguing that they may reinforce the binary structure of "victimization-retaliation," undermine complex reflections on power relations, and fail to provide sustainable pathways for feminist practice.

In contrast, the 2024 movie *Herstory*, directed by Shao Yihui, adopts a more restrained and everyday expressive strategy. The movie focuses on the gendered speechlessness and structural disregard women frequently encounter in contemporary urban life. Yet it avoids resorting to radical confrontation or emotional catharsis. Instead, through a meticulously crafted script, it transforms "moments of speechlessness" into narrative resources imbued with satirical tension and humorous texture. Male characters in the movie often embody relatable traits observed through a female lens—such as paternalistic lecturing, narcissistic self-assurance, and emotional instability. While their actions may not constitute explicit harm, they accumulate into oppressive details within female experiences. It is precisely through the comedic treatment of these gendered experiences that the creators enable female audiences to derive a visceral satisfaction from being understood. This satisfaction stems not only from recognizing the absurdity of everyday life but also from witnessing their lived experiences being acknowledged and transformed on screen.

Crucially, *Herstory* does not rest on this

emotional resonance alone. Beyond the laughter, it guides audiences towards a renewed understanding and reflection on the structures of gendered viewing. Through emotional connections between female characters, the introduction of gender theory discourse (such as T-shirt slogans and textual Easter eggs), and the reversal of male perspectives (such as counter-gaze setups), the movie gradually constructs a gentle yet persistent path of structural critique. Subtly, it builds a new model for gendered existence. This strategy diverges from traditional confrontational feminist expression, instead offering new generative logics for female subjectivity within mainstream esthetic mechanisms.

Consequently, this study's interpretation of "sensory gratification" transcends the conventional understanding of "revenge narratives" or "structural counterattacks". Instead, it redefines this phenomenon as a "resonant pleasure" rooted in female lived experience and achieved through humorous, satirical grammar. This reframing better elucidates the mechanisms of emotional mobilization and subjective identification among female audiences within non-confrontational contexts. Furthermore, this study examines the critical potential of "light comedy" grammar within feminist film and television texts, analyzing how Herstory transforms gendered scenarios resonant with women's lived experiences into an "expressive structure that can be laughed at" through meticulous scripting and character design. This transformation not only enriches the expressive techniques of feminist visual creation but also suggests that humor and irony themselves can function as political narrative strategies. Finally, this study posits female viewers' laughter during viewing as a latent reversal mechanism within gendered viewing structures, proposing a perceptual politics analytical approach distinct from traditional "gendered gaze critique" methodologies. Through humorously satirical gendered scenarios, female viewers gain the authority to scrutinize male behavior within the text's provided "safe space." They even briefly experience psychological "power elevation" amidst collective laughter, ceasing to be mere "gendered objects" of observation. Instead, they participate as conspirators in the production and reconfiguration of viewing semantics. This viewing experience, laughing aloud upon comprehension-constitutes a micro-political act

cloaked in light-hearted emotion, revealing the reversibility and fluidity of viewing orders within non-confrontational contexts. This paper employs this theoretical entry point to expand feminist visual studies' understanding of "sensory pleasure," "viewing positions," and "micro-power exchanges."

In summary, this paper will address theoretical concerns regarding expressive strategies and affective construction within feminist film studies. Through an in-depth analysis of the specific text Herstory, it offers new perspectives for understanding the viewing logic and cultural position of contemporary female audiences.

## 2. Literature Review

Contemporary feminist literary and artistic studies increasingly focus on how film and television construct discourses within gender politics and mobilize audience emotions. As a cultural practice, feminist cinema often follows a primary narrative pattern of "oppression-awakening-retaliation," employing techniques such as "revenge" and "emotional triumph" to provide female audiences with cathartic emotional release. However, scholars have reflected that such revenge narratives often merely swap the positions of victim and perpetrator between the sexes, reinforcing a binary oppositional narrative logic without genuinely addressing the fluidity and complexity of gender power relations [1]. Other researchers criticize the "individual triumph" discourse prevalent in post-feminist contexts, arguing that such emotionally charged narratives centered on personal catharsis lack structural reconstruction and reform. Consequently, the feminist practices they promote struggle to gain sustained momentum[2].

Concurrently, academia has begun to focus on a more moderate, less confrontational feminist cinematic strategy, particularly the creative trend of engaging with female experience through gentle, 'light comedy'-style critique. Unlike works that shape female agency through extreme or dramatic events, these pieces transform the structural gender biases, male-dominated discourse, and social discrimination women encounter in daily life into narrative units infused with satire and humor. They thus question and challenge patriarchal ideology through non-violent means. Through this approach, female audiences resonate with the everyday experiences of being "seen" on screen.

They find catharsis for accumulated frustrations within humor, thereby fostering deeper emotional awareness and reflection on gender injustice [3]. Ahmed (2004) argues from an affective politics perspective that emotions themselves serve as vehicles for reproducing social structures. How texts mobilize viewers' empathy mechanisms and construct the cultural coordinates of "who laughs and who is laughed at" constitutes one of the key mechanisms determining whether gender power relations are loosened or reinforced [4].

Moreover, female viewers' viewing practices are increasingly recognized as integral to meaning-making. Whilst Mulvey's (1975) "gaze" theory critiques male-dominated viewing structures, subsequent research has expanded this framework to include "female gaze" and "counter-gaze" perspectives[5]. Within the context of light comedy, irreverent gender-based irony, emotional complicity among women, and the comic treatment of male behavior collectively offer a gentle deconstruction and counterpoint to the prevailing male gaze viewing structure. The movie *Herstory*, examined herein, exemplifies this expressive logic: how it generates "sensory pleasure" through the ironic transformation of everyday details, and how it subsequently proposes a new imagination of gendered life and viewing structures following this emotional mobilization, will be the focus of this paper's further analysis. Grounded in feminist film theory and integrating affective politics with research on female humor, this study constructs an analytical framework for examining the subtle shifts in female viewers' sensory pleasure and viewing structures within light comedy imagery [11].

First, drawing upon feminist viewing theory, this paper emphasizes the distribution of gendered power and the formation of subject positions within the act of viewing. Chen Ming contends that the female gaze renders female characters on screen as active, multi-faceted subjects [5]. Building upon this, this paper examines the construction of the "female gaze" in *Herstory*, exploring how the text employs characterization and narrative strategies to enable female viewers to achieve sensory resonance and subjective identification during viewing, thereby temporarily disrupting the gendered distribution logic of mainstream viewing structures [14].

Secondly, this paper introduces theories of female humor and affective politics to elucidate

the gendered perceptual foundations and cultural-political implications of laughter. Sara Ahmed (2004) contends that emotion serves as a pivotal mechanism for community formation and the exercise of social power, particularly within sensory responses such as humor, shame, and pleasure, where emotion itself becomes political[4]. Sawallisch (2024) , further emphasizes that female humor, through strategies like self-deprecation and satire, "both delivers pleasure and plays the role of killjoy[7]. By analyzing the comedic portrayal of "gender-speechless moments" in *Herstory*, this paper argues that the very construction of these punchlines distills collective female emotional experience. Audience laughter thus constitutes both a resonant response and a micro-exercise of "power of viewing".

Finally, this paper integrates the aforementioned theories into an analysis of the politics of perception and the position of female audiences, addressing questions such as 'who is laughing', 'what does laughter signify', and 'can female viewing practices be transformed into subjectivity'. This paper contends that the secure viewing context and esthetic complicity mechanisms provided by *Herstory* enable female viewers to achieve a temporary psychological elevation of power during the viewing process, to reinterpret gender experiences and provisionally construct subject identity through laughter within the light comedy. This subtle loosening of the viewing structure lies not in subversive structural rewriting, but in its provision of a narrative position where female viewers can empathize, laugh, and identify. This opens a gentle yet persistent path for contemporary feminist film practices [10].

### **3. Script and Narrative Mechanisms: Transforming 'Silent Moments' into Comic Relief**

#### **3.1 The Comic Ridicule of Patriarchal Figures**

##### **3.1.1 Transforming objects of power into objects of ridicule**

The movie first applies a "de-masculinizing" filter to patriarchal figures through narrative setup and character introduction mechanisms. For instance, when the ex-husband first appears, his dialog with Tie Mei during the move:

Ex-husband: I had a vasectomy for you.

Tie Mei: Let me see if it's a permanent one.

Ex-husband (dodging hastily): I'm just checking

today-the operation's scheduled for next month. This sequence exploits the reversal of male bodily confidence (as symbolic capital) to generate awkwardness and retreat. The stark contrast between "proud promise and hasty retreat" creates a classic comic incongruity. As contemporary female humor studies note, laughter often springs from the abrupt subversion of social role expectations and the grotesque distortion of power postures[8]. The ex-husband's retreat in this situation instantly nullifies his earlier bravado. Audiences laugh at this sudden reversal, finding his predicament absurdly comical. This absurdity partially satisfies the spectator's sense of superiority, but more significantly, within the context of female humor, it delivers the gratification of "seeing through" male bravado. This redistribution of emotion undermines established power structures; mocking an act is itself an act of diminishing its control [3]. The previously stifling male posturing is now comically transformed into public amusement. Female viewers gain a fleeting sense of emotional identification and positional advantage through laughter: the male promises that once left them speechless are now converted into live comedy punchlines. Audience sentiment shifts from initial offense to a knowing chuckle born of recognition. Laughter does not erase the issue but neutralizes its threat[9]. In other words, the punchline does not negate the subject of male boasting; rather, laughter compresses its oppressive weight, rendering it less intimidating. Similarly, after a fierce "masculine contest" at Tie Mei's dinner table, Xiao Ma and her ex-husband vie to demonstrate attentiveness by carrying the garbage bags. After dinner, Xiao Ma hails a taxi home, coincidentally boarding one driven by her ex-husband. This sequence achieves a dual effect of situational irony and narrative coincidence: The two men had just simulated the posture of "progressive males" through their heated dinner debate on feminism and their eager scramble for household chores. Yet the plot immediately punctures this façade through the reversal of roles: "passenger without a car" versus "part-time driver", revealing the slightly awkward reality behind their purported "progressive stance". The stark disparity between posture and circumstance instantly dissolves the men's power performance into self-deprecating farce. This comedic exposure serves a satirical critique: by highlighting the rift

between performative progress and reality, the movie humorously mocks and challenges the male characters' self-assured sense of authority. In this instant, the movie deftly redirects the gaze: the audience no longer aligns with the male characters' self-positioning but instead turns to mock them. The traditional cinematic structure of "active male/passive female" gaze is inverted: men become the objects of observation and ridicule, while women seize the active gaze[5]. As Tang (2024) observes, the "politics of laughter" in contemporary Chinese feminist comedy employs this strategy of "decentralized viewing" to carve out spaces for female expression and resistance within disciplined realities. Through similar mechanisms, this movie transforms the male characters' displays of power into farce, deconstructing and satirizing patriarchal posturing through laughter [9].

### 3.2 Performance Performed

During the meal at Tie Mei's home, the following exchange occurs:

Tie Mei (somewhat sarcastically): You've done rather well for yourself.

Ex-husband: Right? I've made even more progress since we split. I've been studying constantly and now understand structural oppression. We've been reaping too many gender dividends.

Xiao Ma: Yes, we all carry original sin.

Ex-husband: What? How do you know that? (to Tiemie) Did you teach him?

Xiao Ma: No, I've been studying it on my own.

Ex-husband: How many articles by Ueno Chizuko have you read?

Xiao Ma: I've read all of Wang Tiemai's reports.

The ex-husband attempted to establish discursive dominance by wielding feminist knowledge as symbolic capital. Yet the movie has Xiao Ma deftly cut off his showboating with the line "I've read all the reports on Wang Tiemei," transforming "Ueno" from a serious academic symbol into a mocked label. The ex-husband intended his pointed question to cause embarrassment, but instead exposed his identity as nothing more than a slogan-chanting "ally." The audience laughs, recognizing that so-called "progressive discourse" is merely mechanical mimicry. The exposed progressive posture becomes a laughing stock. This laughter stems from identifying a shared absurdity: it arises not from deliberate offense, but from seeing through the truth[12]. As Ahmed (2017) observes,

mocking something often entails exposing and amplifying it while simultaneously diminishing its power over us. The humor in Tie Mei and Xiao Ma's responses achieves a subtle rebalancing of power through seemingly gentle yet incisive undermining. This strategy resembles what Krefting (2014) terms "critical humor" – using laughter to challenge and deconstruct structures of inequality[13]. Thus, the more the ex-husband attempts to score points with "woke" rhetoric, the more he appears merely a "slogan ally" using women's issues to whitewash his own image. This logic of contrast permeates the entire movie: for instance, while Xiao Ma claims to have "been studying feminist literature," he simultaneously mimics "ripping off underwear like in the films" during moments of passion. This creates a dissonance between theory and bodily instinct: intellectually pursuing an ethic of equality, yet in practice remaining ensnared within a male-centered script of pleasure. This failed mimicry reveals the movie's biting comedic edge: when male "progress" is translated into physical action, it instantly exposes its performative nature, still rooted in a male gaze. The audience's laughter does not seek to undermine anything, but rather springs from an insight into and deconstruction of the illusion of equality. This precisely demonstrates humor's function within a feminist context: its understated subversion may appear gentle, yet it powerfully redistributes discursive power[13].

This logic is amplified in the collective reflection following Xiao Ye's suicide:

Ex-husband: It's still my fault. I simply didn't care enough about women. It's true that, as a man, I struggle to empathize with women, but I made no effort to break through that barrier. I just indulged myself in the comfort zone of privilege. Shame on me!

The ex-husband's impassioned self-reproach appears profound semantically, yet its rhythm, word choice, and emotional cadence are highly "formatted." This "model answer"-style self-criticism renders his reflection more akin to a performative act than genuine remorse. The audience's laughter stems precisely from this sense of being "seen through": in his "performance of reflection," the man once again exposes his instrumental approach to feminist issues. The movie continually exposes the performative nature of these patriarchal postures, rendering them comical. This transformation

turns female viewers' initial speechlessness into knowing laughter born of recognition.

#### **4. The Condensation and Satire of Female Experience**

##### **4.1 Everyday Experiences**

The movie distills and satirizes women's everyday experiences, transforming originally speechless predicaments into shared comic moments. These life experiences are both familiar scenarios for audiences and recurring topics on social media, thus triggering rapid recognition and resonance when appearing on screen. As Ahmed (2004) observes, emotion is not an internal psychological state but a sociocultural practice circulating among groups within shared contexts[4]. Research indicates that feminist humor often channels everyday pressures and predicaments through defiant wit and satire, serving as a non-violent means to question and challenge patriarchal ideology and gender inequality[13]. The movie precisely employs this mechanism to 'translate' the originally awkward sense of oppression into a shared moment of recognition, enabling female viewers to affirm their mutual circumstances and emotional solidarity through laughter. For instance, when Tie Mei first arrives at the editorial office, she spots a female colleague wearing unconventional undergarments and blurts out: "What on earth are you wearing? Send me the link." This jest reveals workplace demands on women's appearance while transforming awkwardness into comic relief through sharp wit. Here, laughter does not negate oppression but reframes it as a collectively recognized source of humor. As the research institute observes, humor can provoke questioning and reflection on societal stereotypes through satirical expression. Through such comedic moments, female characters and audiences mutually affirm: when women's real-life predicaments are openly voiced, it brings a sense of relief, as if "it's finally been said." Similarly, when Tie Mei dines with the band members and Xiao Ye broaches the subject of menstruation, the movie has a child declare: "What's shameful about having your period? Half the world's population bleeds!" The camera then cuts to the three men present, who nod awkwardly in agreement. Here, female bodily experience is expressed affirmatively, while the men are reduced to

passive responses. This dialog achieves a reversal of the gaze: the previously concealed reality of female experience is stated openly and unapologetically. The audience's laughter carries the cathartic relief of "it's finally been said aloud." By bringing suppressed bodily topics into the open, the movie deepens recognition of female experience and intensifies emotional resonance among female viewers.

## 4.2 Capturing and Teasing the Language of Intimacy

Xiao Hu's disclaimer-style confession: "I've got issues. I can't commit to relationships. But of course, I do fancy you." And the exchange during the three-way confrontation with Tie Mei and Xiao Ye at the bar:

Tieméi: So, you betrayed me! For a man! A man! That bloody thing! Isn't it just... I lost to you? Lost to a man? Ridiculous!

Xiao Ye: He's the only one.

Xiao Hu (delighted): Really?

Tieméi: Do you have other girlfriends?

Xiao Hu: Not exactly girlfriends. More like friends with benefits.

Xiao Ye: Do you flatter other girls like that too?

Xiao Hu: Every girl has her own special qualities, right?

This exchange became a classic comedic moment in the movie. Such phrasing aligns perfectly with the concept of a "situationship" in contemporary social media discourse: professing affection while evading commitment, suspending the relationship in an ambiguous limbo. For female audiences, this kind of banter has long been a running joke in online circles, triggering recognizable laughter when portrayed on screen. Sawallisch (2024) observes that laughter within female humor possesses a rebellious quality, simultaneously fostering collective solidarity[7] while serving as a "feminist snapshot" that loudly resists injustice, thereby challenging and dismantling oppressive cultural structures. This is precisely the case here: the frustrating predicament of ambiguous relationships is rewritten as material for collective banter, where laughter serves both to expose and alleviate. Simultaneously, the movie presents the normality of typical gender dynamics through small vignettes. For instance, a fleeting shot captures Xiao Hu enthusiastically showcasing himself on the rooftop, while Xiao Ye forces a smile and pretends to listen. This scene carries immense recognisability without

exaggeration: female viewers instantly grasp this everyday power imbalance—men revel in self-promotion while women are compelled to provide emotional labor. The humor thus lies not in mocking individuals, but in exposing a universal relational pattern.

## 4.3 Cathartic Humor in Counter-attack Scenarios

More direct scenes generate catharsis through female characters' counterattacks. For instance, when Xiao Ye is followed by a stranger at the outset, Tie Mei promptly tails the man in turn, making him experience the "flavor" of being stalked. Similarly, Tie Mei publicly reprimands a man urinating in public. Another example is when Xiao Ma, during an intimate moment with Tie Mei, does something she dislikes (tearing an expensive bra), prompting Tie Mei to halt and rebuke him immediately. These sequences transform discomfort familiar to female audiences into comedic moments of retribution, converting resentment into cathartic laughter. This exemplifies the "re-attachment" of emotion described by Ahmed (2004): shame and fear are detached from female experience and re-attached to male embarrassment[4].

By distilling workplace dynamics, bodily experiences, intimate relationships, everyday interactions, and public spaces, the movie constructs a network of comedic moments driven by female experiences. These scenes not only trigger recognizable laughter but also, through the redistribution of emotion [4], grant female viewers identity affirmation within shared banter. Echoing the earlier section on "the comic grotesqueness of patriarchal figures," these experiences are realized through specific pragmatic strategies. Whether through rhetorical questions, irony, or understated dry humor, they transform female viewers' "speechless moments" into shared recognition and pleasure.

## 5. The Gentle Challenge and Reconstruction of Viewing Structures

### 5.1 The Female Gaze: A Shift from Male Competition to Appreciation

In traditional cinematic narratives, the "gaze" typically signifies male subjects observing and possessing women, with women relegated to passive positions of being watched and judged. However, Herstory cleverly shifts the gaze's agency to female dominance by constructing

scenarios of "male rivalry" among its male characters. The movie features multiple scenes of male rivalry, such as the dialog between Xiao Ma and her ex-husband upon their first meeting:

Xiao Ma: You look rather young.

Ex-husband: I am young. You appear older than me.

Xiao Ma: Because my skin is naturally barley-colored.

Another example occurs when Iron Mei decides to send her child to learn drumming from Xiao Ma. Upon learning this, the ex-husband confronts Xiao Ma:

Ex-husband: Do you teach adults?

Xiao Ma: I do. Would you like to learn?

Ex-husband: Not really. I can already play a bit (begins whistling off-key).

What these passages share is this: what should have been a female-centered "female rivalry" plot is shifted by the director into a contest between men, while female characters are placed in positions of spectatorship and critique.

This shift manifests not only narratively but also within the viewing structure. The movie grants Tie Mei, and indeed female viewers, a perspective akin to that of a 'critic'. They are no longer objects of contention but observe, tease, and even 'rate' the men's self-presentation in awkward situations. Chen (2024) observes that the female gaze is not a mere inversion of the male gaze, but a concrete manifestation of feminist consciousness within cinema[6]; through this mode of observation, female directors can endow female characters with greater agency and dynamism, transforming them into powerful forces within the narrative. In this context, the audience's laughter stems not only from the absurdity of male behavior, but also from the female subject's "unmasking" of this absurdity.

Thus, the "female gaze" presented in *Herstory* is not merely a role reversal, but a redistribution of the viewing structure. By satirizing male machismo, the movie allows female characters and female audiences to briefly yet powerfully seize the initiative through laughter. This shift in position not only dissolves the oppressive weight of patriarchal posturing, but also generates emotional-political pleasure and identification during the viewing experience. In other words, the movie transforms the female audience's moments of speechlessness into comedic moments of insight, thereby achieving a subtle reversal of power dynamics within the viewing

mechanism.

## 5.2 Fostering Collective Identity Through Emotional Complicity

If the "female gaze" primarily grants audiences temporary agency through a reversal of perspective, the movie's other major strategy lies in generating collective identity through "emotional complicity." This "emotional complicity" is not merely the sharing of comedic moments between characters and viewers, but a mutual validation mechanism rooted in shared gendered experiences. By exposing the narcissistic logic, romantic rhetoric, and self-assured posturing common among men in intimate relationships, the movie transforms potentially disheartening "speechless moments" into shared laughter among female viewers.

The portrayal of the "typical male" is particularly emblematic. For instance, when confronting Xiao Ye, Xiao Hu declares, "I didn't realize I meant so much to you. I've broken up with all the others. Let's be together properly," even attributing her suicide to himself: "So you killed yourself for me?" He urges her, "Don't ask why, just love me." This extreme self-centered logic, which in reality often leaves women feeling powerless and speechless, is exaggerated on screen. This allows the audience to burst into laughter upon recognizing it. Xiao Ye's line, "Sorry, I can't do this anymore," acts like a stage-crashing moment, utterly exposing the narcissistic man's absurdity. The audience's laughter carries a cathartic "finally someone said it" satisfaction, forming a collective satire of male narcissistic logic.

The ex-husband's lines are equally self-centered: "Don't harbor any illusions that she takes you seriously, for I've already broken her heart beyond repair. She'd seen through men's true nature-it's incurable, not even Chinese herbal medicine can fix it." Here, he appropriates Tie Mei's emotional experiences as his own, as if he alone determined her fate. Xiao Ma swiftly dismantles this narcissism with the line "Your symptoms are rather severe, aren't they?", deftly transforming what could have been suffocating patriarchal discourse into comic relief. The audience's laughter stems not from *schadenfreude* over male suffering, but from recognizing that such "self-centered narratives" are precisely the tropes countless women have repeatedly endured in reality.

These sequences collectively form a distinctive

viewing mechanism: the audience's laughter stems not from strangeness, but precisely from overfamiliarity. The movie employs highly everyday, culturally resonant language to transform individual spectator experiences into collective laughter, translating "personal discomfort" into "collective banter". In this process, audiences not only achieve mild emotional release but also reaffirm their stance through laughter. In other words, Herstory employs irony to subvert the logic of universal assumptions and disclaimer rhetoric, transforming individual women's "isolated predicaments" into "collective recognition." Laughter thus becomes a mild form of identity politics.

### 5.3 Reflective Humor and Emotional Solidarity Politics

If the "female gaze" grants audiences a sense of dominance through visual perspective, and "emotional complicity" fosters collective identity through shared laughter, the movie's deepest function lies in achieving reflective political effects through humor. Sara Ahmed (2004) contends that emotion is not merely an internal psychological state but a "cultural practice circulating between the body and society" [4], capable of bridging individual experience and collective structures. In other words, the audience's laughter itself constitutes a social phenomenon: it weaves isolated experiences into a shared emotional network, thereby generating political stances.

In Herstory, this reflective humor is particularly pronounced. Laughter does not merely stop at mockery but continually prompts the audience to look back: why do we find these male characters so "laughable"? Their lines and postures are not comical because they are absurd, but because they all too faithfully reproduce the normalized operation of patriarchal logic in reality. As Abondio (2024) observes, gender identities are constructed through repeated behaviors and social norms[15]; the movie's stereotypical male characters expose their "absurdity" precisely through exaggerated reenactments of this performance. Through laughter, audiences not only recognize shared experiences but also gain critical distance from patriarchal discourse.

This critical laughter also constitutes identity politics among the audience. Within the public space of the theater, when female viewers collectively laugh, they temporarily share a

common ground: we have all experienced and recognized this logic, and we are willing to dismantle it through laughter. Compared to direct denunciation or anger, humor proves more pervasive and inclusive. It avoids violent confrontation while quietly dismantling gender power structures beneath a veneer of mildness. The movie thus cultivates a distinctive "politics of laughter": critique achieved not through loud protest, but through quiet satire.

Simultaneously, this laughter carries a certain reflective tension. After the laughter subsides, audiences inevitably ponder: why can we only expose the logic of commonplace beliefs through the lens of comedy? How do we navigate such relational dilemmas in real life? The movie leaves viewers with precisely this "incomplete sense of liberation" – laughter cannot entirely resolve the predicament, yet it grants us a collective emotional resonance through recognition and empathy. This very resonance serves as a reaffirmation of female experience.

Thus, the humor in Herstory transcends mere entertainment; it is a form of "reflective humor". Through satire and exaggeration, it transforms private experience into public discourse; through laughter, it politicizes emotion into a practice of solidarity. Ultimately, the movie constructs not merely a light-hearted comedic atmosphere, but a space where female audiences can affirm their identities, consolidate their positions, and gently interrogate gender structures through laughter.

### 6. Conclusion

This study examines the role of feminist light comedies in sensory gratification and the transformation of viewing structures through an analysis of the movie Herstory. Findings reveal that patriarchal behaviors exhibited by male characters are exaggerated through humorous techniques, reinforced by dialog design, physical gestures, and cinematographic language. This humor not only diminishes male authority but also provides female audiences with an emotional psychological high, temporarily granting them viewing agency through laughter. The banter, mutual support, and emotional complicity among female characters further amplify this effect, distilling, magnifying, and presenting female experiences through humor. This fosters psychological resonance and identification among the audience.

Thus, it can be argued that the 'right to laugh'



constitutes not merely a sensory experience but a structural recalibration of viewing positions. Within the cinema, when female audiences collectively laugh, this laughter itself becomes a perceptible transfer of power: achieved not through direct conflict or counterattack, but progressively constructed through being seen, resonated with, and empowered. This recalibration not only alters individual viewing experiences but also, at the narrative level, renders new gender relations visually possible. It begins to reveal a gendered world mediated by humor and complicity, one that does not depend on confrontation.

Theoretically, the humor mechanisms of light comedies offer a distinctive pathway for feminist filmmaking: through sensory, psychological, and structural reconfigurations, they enable the reimagining of gender power dynamics within everyday, emotionally resonant contexts. Future research may further explore this mechanism's application across other film genres or cross-cultural contexts, examining how the humorous portrayal of patriarchal figures influences audience gender perceptions, socio-emotional responses, and cultural imagination, thereby offering broader references for feminist filmmaking and gender studies.

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