



April 2021

Women Is Losers

John C. Lyden

University of Nebraska-Omaha, johnclyden@gmail.com

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Recommended Citation

Lyden, John C. (2021) "Women Is Losers," *Journal of Religion & Film*: Vol. 25: Iss. 1, Article 54.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.32873/uno.dc.jrf.25.01.065>

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/jrf/vol25/iss1/54>

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Women Is Losers

Abstract

This is a film review of *Women Is Losers* (2021), directed by Lissette Feliciano.

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Author Notes

John Lyden is Professor of Religious Studies and the Blizek Professor of Religion and Film at University of Nebraska-Omaha. He was been the Editor of the *Journal of Religion & Film* since 2011. He is the author of *Film as Religion: Myths, Morals, and Rituals* (NYU Press), and the editor of the *Routledge Companion to Religion and Film* and co-editor (with Eric Michael Mazur) of the *Routledge Companion to Religion and Popular Culture*. He also co-edited, with Ken Derry, *The Myth Awakens: Canon Conservatism, and Fan Reception of Star Wars* (Wipf and Stock 2018).



Women is Losers (2021), dir. Lissette Feliciano

At the beginning of *Women Is Losers*, we might get the impression that we are about to watch an adolescent comedy about rebellious Catholic school girls in the 1960s, struggling with their own sexual urges in an environment that denies them, sneaking off to be with their army boyfriends. I had a heads up that was not the case in the very first scene, however, as the characters break the fourth wall to lecture the camera about white male privilege and the inherent biases against women in our society. This feels more ironic than pedantic, which is a good thing, as the tone of the whole film avoids yielding to full-out melodrama—instead choosing to balance gutsy hope with realism. This is neither a lightweight and overly optimistic comedy about successful women, nor a downbeat story of the impossibility of minority female power, but rather an encouragement to believe in women and celebrate their drive and courage.

Celina (Lorenza Izzo) finds herself unable to finish high school when she becomes pregnant, and although she considers terminating the pregnancy, she avoids this when the very real

dangers of illegal abortion are made painfully clear to her. Everyone is judgmental and unsupportive, from her abusive father who takes her money, to her neglectful boyfriend with PTSD, to her work supervisor who cannot understand the challenges of balancing a job with childcare. Her luck seems to be changing when her boss, Gilbert Li (Simu Liu), promotes her to bank teller and teaches her how to save for a home. He turns to the camera to give the audience a mini-history lecture about his own Chinese immigrant grandparents, who had to work against prejudice and the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 which prevented their citizenship or their ability to be hired as laborers. He advises hard work and thrift as the best means for success, and Celina begins to follow that path.

This might have become just a story of hardworking immigrants pulling themselves up by their own bootstraps; instead, Celina continues to face challenges, as when the bank refuses to lend to a single woman, especially a Latina. “Angry yet?” she yells at the camera, and surely part of the point here is for the audience to feel her frustration, and to realize that even when you do everything right, you can still be denied success in America due to your gender or ethnicity.

The optimism of the film wins, however, as Celina finds unexpected allies such as an interracial couple that befriend her. Minorities help each other, showing that no one can do it all alone, but there is mutual support that can make a difference. Director Lissette Feliciano has said that the story is based in part on that of her own mother, who overcame obstacles to make a life for her family, so this hopeful message is based on real experiences. This does not belittle the challenges, or suggest that those challenges are all in the past. It does suggest that people can learn to be better, including the men who have hurt her, who demonstrate repentance and some ability to change.

The film ends with the announcement of the 1973 *Roe v Wade* Supreme Court decision that legalized abortion, and it is a moment that Celina celebrates as empowering. Today's anti-abortionists seem to conveniently forget how terrible things were for women when it was illegal, so the reminder is worthwhile, even if it is unlikely to change anyone's mind. Most of all, the film celebrates the agency of minorities and women, and points out that legal protections and addressing societal prejudice do play a role in their success: it's not just about working hard, because that won't be enough without the moral and legal support of a society that views them as truly equal. I welcome films like this that manage to tell stories of real struggle with hope, suggesting that the journey is not over for women or minorities, but it has made and will continue to make genuine progress through the efforts of those who believe it is possible as well as necessary.