# Beyond the feminine stereotypes: Tracing societal class barriers in Jojo Moyes' *Me Before You*

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Majed Alenezi[1]
Ayman Elhalafway[2]
Mohammed Abou Adel[3+]
Menna el-Zamzamy[4]
Samir Khalifa[5]

[1]Department of Languages and Translation, College of Humanities and Social Sciences, Northern Border University, Arar, Saudi Arabia.
[1]Email: majed.madhi@nbu.edu.sa
[2,4]Department of English Language and Literature at Faculty of Arts, Kafrelsheikh University, Egypt.
[2]Email: ayman.elhalafawi@art.kfs.edu.eg
[4]Email: menna.mee20@gmail.com
[3]College of Humanities and Social Sciences, Department of Arabic Language and Literature, UAE University, Al Ain, United Arab Emirates.
[3]Email: drabouadel@gmail.com
[5]Medical Sciences and Preparatory Year Department, North Private College of Nursing, Arar, Saudi Arabia.
[5]Email: samirhashem@nec.edu.sa

(+ Corresponding author)

## ABSTRACT

This paper examines the complex nuances of feminist narratives and their diverse interpretations through an in-depth analysis of JoJo Moyes' novel *Me Before You* (2012). Within the framework of feminism, the paper questions normative gender ideals through the lens of the interconnectedness of class, culture, and identity. The paper fills a gap in the research on feminism, womanism, and related movements by analyzing them in a more contextualized way, demonstrating how sociocultural norms are imprinted on the lives of individuals. The paper summarizes how, even in the context of a familiar setting of Luisa Clark, the protagonist, sociocultural forces dictate class, gender, and caregiving expectations. Using a critical lens and sociocultural analysis, the article illustrates how family traditions and social practices strongly mediate Luisa's decisions, needs, and self-worth. It provides a less radical tone but more pragmatic and inclusive feminism compared to much feminist rhetoric. Overall, the article advocates that more studies on feminist literature, gender stereotypes, and identity formation among cultures across the world, with a focus on intersections of gender, power, and social class, are needed. Thus, this study will offer researchers of literary criticism, feminist theory, and identity development with critical new knowledge.

**Contribution/ Originality:** This study contributes the first logical analysis by offering an original intersectional reading of Moyes` *Me Before You*, signifying how real-life experiences of culture, class, and personal identity shape the journey of Louisa Clark. It illuminates the differences among Womanism, feminism, and related movements, widening the feminist literary studies lens.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

This paper takes a critical perspective on the term "feminism" by offering a broad concept and describing the differences between "feminism," "womanism," and other movements. The analysis prioritizes gender stereotypes, especially in relation to cultural inheritance and societal views that influence a person's desire for identity. Moyes (1969-) recounts the story of Louisa Clark, a humble, cheerful, and upbeat young woman who attempts a series of minor jobs to support her family, in her well-known work. When she takes on the role of caregiver for Will Traynor,

an elite, popular, charming, and devoted young man who was once living an exciting and enjoyable life until a gloomy incident left him a paraplegic, her life changes bittersweetly. This paper describes Louisa Clark's progression, showing how she moved past traditional feminist stereotypes through her connection to Will as she developed as a character and within a broader context. This highlights the influence of social and cultural inheritance, family background, the search for identity, and class inequalities, all framed by Moyes (2012) in *Me Before You* (2012). The paper also assesses the weaknesses in prior feminist readings of JoJo Moyes's *Me Before You* and the limitations of previous feminist critical theory that failed to consider how class and cultural factors interact with gender in affirming women's identities. The research problem lies in the absence of an intersectional lens that incorporates these aspects into the analysis of Louisa Clark's story. This paper intertwines feminist theory and sociocultural analysis to demonstrate how the author unsettled radical and traditional feminist understandings in favor of an advocacy for a balanced empowerment model centered on empathy, class awareness, and cultural connectedness. The goal of this research is to clarify how *Me Before You* shifts existing feminist theory to connect aspects of gender, social class, and cultural legacy within contemporary feminism.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This study is one of the very few studies that have filled a gap by providing an unbiased view of feminism and challenging the typical feminist stereotypes through an analysis of Moyes' *Me Before You*. While previous feminist readings of the novel have primarily focused on gender and emotion, they have rarely explored how class and cultural background interact with feminist identity. This study, therefore, responds to that scholarly gap by adopting an intersectional approach that connects gender, class, and culture in shaping women's experiences.

Learning more and more about all shades of feminism and the boost of feminist identity, Diekmann (2023) sheds light on the importance of feminist identity regarding women's career options and social equality, showing how women used the movement to pursue meaning and a sense of their world. Mohajan and Mohajan (2022) explain how feminist grounded theory is appropriate, effective, and highly resourceful in transmitting women's voices and views in modern society. Furthermore, Sitepu and Putri (2020) "The Hierarchy of Needs of Louisa Clark in *Me Before You*" (2020) explores Louisa's needs for identity, love, belonging, security, esteem, and self-actualization; starting from being happy in her safety net without pursuing a bigger life and education for herself; then eventually realizing the importance of identity and finding one's own place in the world, which encourages her to continue her education and pursue a new life full of potential and opportunities.

Although these studies contribute to the understanding of feminist identity and personal development, they remain mostly descriptive and do not sufficiently examine the intersection of gender, class, and socio-cultural constraints that define Louisa Clark's struggle. This paper builds upon and extends these works by providing a critical synthesis of feminist and intersectional theories to reveal how Moyes redefines empowerment beyond traditional feminist ideals.

One of the strongest lines of scholarship concerns women's popular fiction and the construction of femininity. Radway (1984) recontextualized reading romance as an engaged cultural activity rather than passive consumption, emphasizing that women read these texts in ways that enable them to reproduce and resist patriarchal norms. Regis advances this idea by closely examining the structural 'grammar' of romance, where obstacles, attraction, and the pursuit of happy endings typify the heroine's journey, with the heroine typically defined as a woman. In Moyes's novel, Louisa Clark's quest for freedom and her exploration of the unknown are mapped onto the romance paradigm, granting agency but ultimately reinforcing female roles. McRobbie (2009) goes on to show that postfeminist discourse not only normalizes gender hierarchy but also makes femininity and gender autonomy normative. The paper further critiques the relationship of *Me Before You* and postfeminism as an epistemology. Readers do not merely identify Louisa Clark as a romance heroine but as one who must negotiate the limits of her own class and potential. This is what feminist literary critique is often blind to.

Critics of Moyes's book have focused on disability studies. Kafer (2013) condemned cultural narratives that portray disability as antithetical to a desirable future, a narrative reflected in Will Traynor's choice to end his life. Garland-Thomson (2002) assumes that feminist theory needs to incorporate disability to explain how caregiving roles are rendered normative and feminine. Bolt (2021) also criticizes the typical methods of how disability is created and represented, which typically link dignity with liberty and, in a negative way, with death. The following are examples of why the book's description of Will's assisted suicide was offensive, that is, because it implied that disabled people have meaningless lives.

However, unlike these critical approaches, the present study links disability and gender with social class, arguing that caregiving in the novel becomes a symbolic act that exposes both patriarchal and economic power structures. This analytical synthesis allows a broader interpretation of how Moyes intertwines emotional, social, and ideological dimensions to redefine agency.

Moreover, Pramana and Haryanti (2024) "Human Identity Rediscovery in Jojo Moyes' *Me Before You*: Psychoanalysis Theory (2024) discusses the loss and change of human identity in Moyes' novel, the consequences of it, and the journey to rediscover it; while "Self-Resilience of Louisa Clark as Reflected in Moyes (2012) *Me Before You*" (2022) by Supit elaborates on Louisa's self-resilience in her thoughts and actions, and shows how she depends upon her resilience to overcome obstacles in her life. In addition, existing interdisciplinary scholarship enhances these questions by utilizing intersectionality and cultural identity within different literary contexts. Alhourani, Abou Adel, Abd el-Kareem, Khalifa, and Elhalafawy (2026) investigate postcolonial identity in Rohina Malik's Unveiled to show the conjunction of gender and cultural politics within diaspora literature. It is a significant study because it shows how intersectional and postcolonial theory increases our understanding of feminine agency and location in terms of class.

Other researchers' works on the topic of feminism and also the novel, *Me Before You*, have been taken into consideration and learned from in general aspects about the movement and a deeper understanding of the novel's characters. Yet, none of these studies have examined how Moyes's narrative engages with both feminist and socio-economic hierarchies simultaneously. However, this paper fills a gap by providing a more comprehensive vision of feminism, showing both its positive and negative aspects, and more importantly, linking it to the novel and challenging feminist stereotypes through Louisa Clark's personality, her identity, and her relationships across different cultural and societal levels.

Overall, by showing how class, culture, and gender all interact to create women's empowerment in contemporary fiction, this analytical model demonstrates that the current research not only advances but also enhances earlier feminist ideas. The literature review is transformed from a description to interpretive criticism at this intersection, which has a direct bearing on the theory and goals of the study.

## 3. METHODOLOGY

This research paper aims to challenge conventional feminist stereotypes by exploring broader aspects of feminist discourse. It focuses on highlighting the distinction between feminism and its various permutations, both favorable and critical, while also contrasting feminism with womanism from an objective and balanced perspective, free of ideological bias. The paper will not only consider this topic within the prevailing feminist framework, as discussed in Moyes (2012), but will also rigorously go beyond traditional feminist constructions that are often scrutinized. The approach will involve examining and exploring how Louisa, a brilliant and ambitious young woman, subtly challenges normative constructions associated with femininity, both in terms of her character and the overt and covert cultural pressures she faces. The analysis will extend to Louisa's and Will's different social circumstances, illustrating Louisa's position as a working young woman with challenging economic circumstances and limited access to education, contrasted with Will, a wealthy, influential man with ongoing access to social resources and agency.

## 4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The term "feminism" originates from the Latin word "femina," meaning "woman." Feminism was originally established to signify the critical importance of the fight for women's rights and equality among the sexes. As Jain (2020) mentions, feminism is "a collection of social, economic, and political movements and ideas that seek equal rights for women and to end gender inequality" (2020, p. 5). Lorber (2005) states, "The definition of feminism is a social movement whose basic aim is that women and men be equal (2005, p. 1). This simply requires believing that all genders have equal worth and capacity in the personal, social, political, and economic spheres. Beauvoir (1994) examines the historical status of women, interrogating the influence of patriarchal systems on their identity and potential. She provocatively asks, "If women still exist or will always exist, whether or not it is desirable that they should, what place they occupy in this world, what their place should be?" (p. 13). Her questions show how hard it is for women to get recognition, opportunities, and an active role in society.

Freedman (2001) defines feminism as a "concern with women's inferior position in society and with discrimination encountered by women because of their sex" (p. 1), which is a significant part of the feminism movement, as women seek equality and better opportunities both socially and culturally, including those opportunities that naturally exist for men and not women just because of their gender. Similarly, Nahal (1990) characterizes feminism as.

> A mode of existence in which the woman is free of dependence syndrome. There is a dependence syndrome: whether it is the husband, the father, the community, or a religious or ethnic group. When women free themselves of the dependence syndrome and lead a normal life, my [his] idea of feminism materializes. (p. 77)

In this sense, feminists seek to dismantle structures of dependency, encouraging women to achieve financial, social, and political independence. Offen (1988) further articulates this vision by defining feminism as "a theory and/or movement concerned with advancing the position of women through such means as achievement of political, legal, or economic rights equal to those granted to men" (p. 123).

Ever since the beginning of the movement, four main waves of feminism have existed. Each wave marks a specific cultural shift and pursues women's social and cultural growth, along with their involvement with the media and the extent of societal change achieved. The first wave of feminism primarily refers to women's rights movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It represents the pioneering and defining phase of feminist activism during that period. The first wave introduced the concept of the "New Woman," a redefined image of femininity that openly resisted the restrictions imposed by a male-dominated society and culture. Women began voicing their frustration with the denial of fundamental rights such as access to education, employment, voting, reproductive freedom, property ownership, marital independence, social participation, and respect. Media representations of this era often reinforced patriarchal biases, but breakthroughs occurred when women entered new professional domains. For instance, Jepsen (2000) notes that in telegraphy, women "entered a challenging… technological field in which they competed with men" to begin a "subculture of technically educated workers" (p. 2).

As the first wave concluded with the acknowledgment of women's right to vote, the second wave of feminism emerged in the aftermath of the postwar chaos and the atmosphere of the liquefaction of social roles to draw a focus on women's work environment and different family statuses. The second wave was more influenced by poststructuralism, deconstruction, and psychoanalysis; it established interest in women's lived and shared experiences and the relationship between womanhood in social practice and media representation. The second wave of feminism basically revolved around women's struggles and desires for gaining televisual presence, as it was a significant factor for expansion and important for overcoming employment patterns and representation templates to provide a more balanced, equal, and reliable practice for all. These efforts were recognized as of 1984, when the Council of Europe adopted a decree on the equality between men and women in the media, marking a major step towards the acknowledgment of women.

After the 1990s, the internet explosion era brought new possibilities for communication, along with more changes and expanded access to many technologies and services worldwide. Women's voices began to gain broader access and

were easily and widely disseminated internationally, exploring technologies and their related media platforms. A significant part of the third wave during this period subscribed to the benefits of technological development, highlighting the opportunities emerging from women's contributions to technological evolution and the emergence of cyberspace. There was a growing focus on using internet technologies to advance the feminist agenda and reshape sources of social impact. An important aspect of this movement was the awareness of DIY (Do It Yourself), related to self-broadcasting and self-made representation, which remains effective today, followed by new activist awareness and styles. The third wave marked a period of increased expertise in navigating the internet, producing webpages, electronic zines, and blogs (Whelehan, 2007). This movement cultivated new forms of feminist consciousness, enabling women to claim space in digital culture while fostering greater independence in professional, social, and cultural domains.

Toward the 2010s, modern feminism was refreshed through actions that spread internationally across the internet and in the streets to protest violence against women and children. Most social media platforms mark a new period, a new agenda, and a new manner in the feminist struggle that was termed the fourth wave. The private and organized use of social media became a real help for the fight against harassment, professional discrimination, media sexism, and gender shaming. It also became a step forward in meeting a globally inclusive, participatory, and insightful feminism, open to women's voices from outside the Western context. The fourth wave shows interest in chief feminist values and, as such, welcomes a transgenerational dialogue in which women of different feminist periods can share and enjoy. Currently, feminism is creating a broad landscape of activities that marry various social, cultural, political, and aesthetic aspects of the contemporary condition. It engages femininity in all social affairs and manages those aspects of equality in politics that dethrone systems of power toward a more environmental and, therefore, more encompassing social politics.

Branching from feminism is Ecofeminism, which is a movement and a theory that tightly links the objectives of natural and feminine liberty and seeks an end to all kinds of oppression. Ecofeminism sees a connection between the oppression of women and the degradation of nature, and it examines the effect of gender categories in order to demonstrate how social norms cause unjust dominance over women and nature. Ecofeminism's basic premise is that the ideology that authorizes oppressions such as those based on race, class, gender, sexuality, physical abilities, and species is the same ideology that sanctions the oppression of nature (Gaard, 1993). Ecofeminists believe that the intolerance of women's injustice is as important as nature's injustice and suffering; according to Ling (2014), "Ecofeminism emphasizes recognizing the importance of ecological system protection from a female perspective and develops its vision of feminist theory in the practice of ecological movement" (p. 70).

The movement seeds were indeed sprouting in the nineteenth century, but it was not until the twentieth century that real change was noticed on many levels. The world has witnessed women being involved in different fields; scientific and social achievements led to civil rights and liberation movements worldwide, not only in the United States, which eventually grassroots diverse feminist movements and provided women with clearer, more significant roles and opportunities. Mann (1989) makes it clear that "the roots of the modern feminist movement stem, in part, from sexism within the civil rights" (p. 134).

Nowadays, the term *feminism* encompasses a wide range of perspectives and movements. It is no longer confined to a single meaning or unified group, but rather includes Radical Feminism, Socialist Feminism, Marxist Feminism, Liberal Feminism, Lesbian Feminism, and Ecofeminism, among many others. Collectively, these strands fall under the larger umbrella of feminism, which broadly represents women's independence, inner freedom, and the pursuit of balance and equality between men and women.

However, this diversity of approaches has caused fractures among feminists. Some feminists seem to be participating in activities that are unrelated to what it meant historically. Women have historically struggled with feelings of inferiority in order to attain meaningful status in society, find employment, engage in independent thinking, and be recognized for their capabilities (Adel, Mohamed, & Altwaiji, 2024). Gradually, the original aim of

the movement gets lost as advocates' personal motivations, cultural background, social identity, and value systems differ. What was intended as an avenue for women to express themselves and ensure they had a place in the world has, at times, become an avenue for other personal interests or even for some organizational identities with different agendas. This splintering has led to the formation of radical feminists, womanists, and, of course, women who care for the feminist idea but don't like the term feminist. As Jaworska and Krishnamurthy (2012) point out, "while there is an understanding of contemporary gender inequalities …, for instance, the gender pay gap, women very seldom identify as feminists, or indeed outright reject feminism" (p. 402). Sommers (1994) shares a similar concern in *Who Stole Feminism*: "I have been motivated to write this book because I am a feminist" (p. 18). She refuses to use the term to reflect cultural views that many women think convey or represent the core values of feminism, but feel embarrassed, awkward, or ashamed to be labeled feminist.

Among the most controversial strands, White Radical Feminists have often been criticized for framing feminism primarily around white women's struggles in male-dominated societies. Even if their stated aim was equality, some did take extreme positions, portraying "all men [as] the enemies of all women," and even further, proposing separatist or utopian female communities; and even the subjugation or extermination of all men" (Hooks, 1992). Although feminism underscores working together with men and women for a more just society, radical feminists usually limit their focus on active resistance to male oppression to the exclusion of everything else, even to the extent of rejecting men. As Joslin (2003) notes, they challenged the idea that "a woman has no value to society except that which man gives her, as the object of his desire and the mother of his children" (p. 459). Although motherhood remains one of the most significant roles for women in society, radical feminists clamored for visibility and authority in other arenas not limited by patriarchal definitions. This position, however, is not without controversy. African-American women, for instance, often felt exploited by white radicals, who, in Deyab's (2004) terms, were seeking a female victory in the white sexual political game. Thus, it is evident that women of color perceive their separation from feminism.

This tension helps explain the rise of *womanism*, a movement that, while related to feminism, is distinct in its focus and values. The term was coined by the African-American author and activist Alice Walker (1944-). In *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, Walker (1983) creates a type of feminism specifically for women of color and African Americans. She defines Womanism as "a black feminist" or "feminist of color" (p. 11). Walker gave a powerful voice to women of color and their communities, insisting that the struggle against oppression must involve both women and men. By being womanists, women of color side with their men against white ethnicity: "they have not taken a stand against their fellow men just because they are men.

Rather, they believe that any healing process for African-American women should include African-American men as well," teaming up against white supremacy in general. "They believe that the problems of African-American women and men are much the same, and as such require common ground and understanding to fight the oppression they are facing," Deyab (2004). Womanism, therefore, rejects the exclusivity of white feminism and instead creates its own system of equality rooted in racial and cultural solidarity. Venkatesan (2008) emphasizes that "Womanism is a cultural aesthetic that embraces a humanistic rather than an examination of the politics of oppression or the other related concerns of black feminism" (p. 197). Womanism thus integrates spiritual and cultural dimensions alongside the material. Hooks (1992) clarifies that "as far back as slavery, white people established a social hierarchy based on race and sex, that ranked white men first, white women second, though sometimes equal to black men who ranked third, and black women last" (p. 53).

In addition, Walker's placement of the color purple as a symbol of Womanism implies that the deeper color signifies a more grounded ideological identity and power than the lighter color. Izgarjan and Markov (2012) believe that "she [Walker] extols womanism and sets it apart by comparing it to the strong color of purple, which is often described as the royal color" (p. 305). This only proves how deeply women of color care about distinguishing themselves from feminism in general and white radicals in particular.

## 5. DISCUSSION AND RESULTS

*Me Before You* is also about elaborating personal identity alongside cultural and social heritage. It also considers how feminist identities develop and the implications of social status. Peltola, Milkie, and Presser (2004) state that variations in social status, such as race, gender, ethnicity, and class, significantly affect a person's inclination toward feminism (pp. 122-144). Identity holds complexity that includes personal life experiences, social roles, cultural traditions, family history, religious background, socioeconomic status, and individual characteristics. These dimensions guide the individual's journey toward self-discovery, acceptance, and meaning-making.

Cultural heritage, social constraints, and personal experience all have a significant impact on identity in literature and in real life. Characters are frequently portrayed as maneuvering through the expectations of their cultural and social contexts, with inherited values and traditions shaping their sense of belonging and their position within the wider social framework (Adel et al., 2024). Literature serves as a lens for the critical examination of the complexities of human existence, especially regarding the influence of cultural and social heritage on personal identity.

Popular support for gender equality has been increasing over the past several decades. In some ways, this trend facilitates individuals in expressing support for the original feminist ideals of equality. This shift in attitudes, combined with increasing opportunities for women in education, the workplace, and politics, reflects a broader societal change. Support for gender equality includes the belief that it is acceptable for married women to work if they choose and that educational and career opportunities should not be determined by gender. These perspectives have become more widespread and are now accepted globally.

Reger (2008) suggests that this transformation in the social landscape also creates potential ambivalence towards feminist identities. As attitudes about women and gender inequality liberalize, the distinctions between self-identified feminists and non-feminists tend to diminish, weakening the boundaries between these groups (pp. 101-120). Bamberg (2014) emphasizes that identity emerges from the ongoing negotiation of selfhood across various social and personal dimensions such as age, gender, race, ethnicity, class, and nation (p. 1). In essence, the quest for identity involves establishing a coherent sense of oneself and one's path in all aspects of life, including perceptions of social and cultural roles. It is widely believed that "our narrative identifies are the stories we live by" McAdams, Josselson, and Lieblich (2006).

Building on the discussion of narrative identity, we will now focus on how gender, race, and class factor into individuals' agentic experiences. These are not separable variables (e.g., gender, race, and class) or aspects of one's identity. Rather, they intersect with one another in various ways that significantly shape Louisa Clark's development in *Me Before You*.

This analysis moves beyond a simple narrative summary by utilizing the theoretical framework of intersectional feminism to demonstrate how Moyes reconfigures female agency through the lenses of class and identity. Louisa's evolution serves as an example of the interconnectedness of gender, social mobility, and cultural affiliation, suggesting empowerment arises from contexts rather than rebellion, and one can emerge empowered by exploring the layers of these intersections.

Thus, in this more empowered approach, Moyes's message embodies a moderate, humanistic feminism that resists both radical disengagement and quiet passivity, which can then solidify anxieties of assimilation, and at the same time grounds a harmonious integration of theory and narrative in her total medium.

Figure 1 shows a triple Venn diagram that illustrates how traditional feminism, womanism, and class barriers overlap. This demonstrates how their intersection creates different ways for women to gain power.

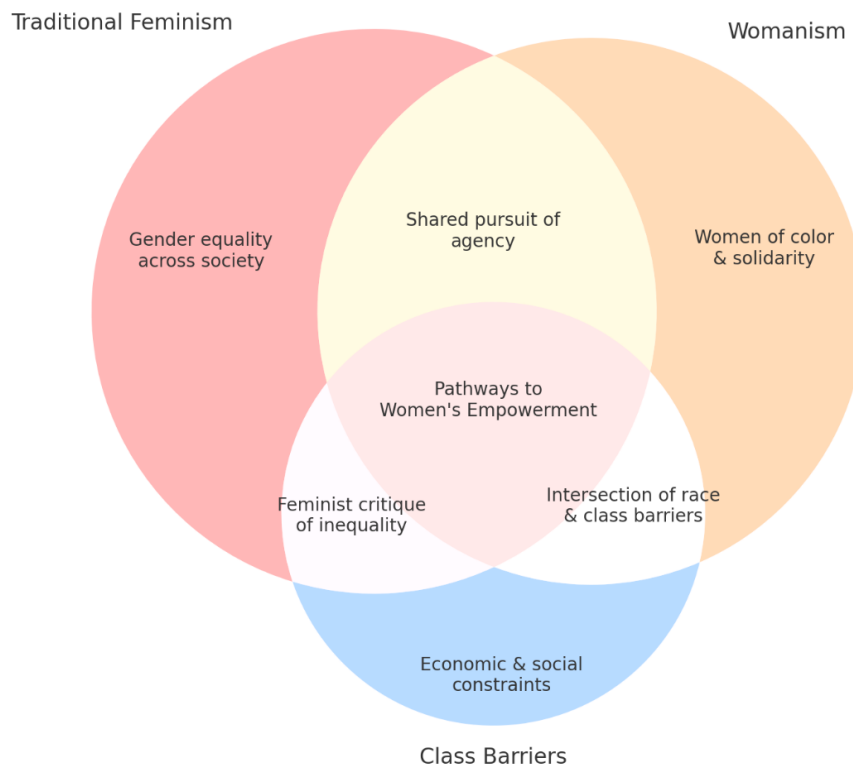## Triple Venn Diagram: Feminism, Womanism, and Class Barriers in *Me Before You*

Figure 1 exemplifies how traditional feminism, womanism, and class barriers all intersect in Jojo Moyes' Me Before You. Each circle reflects a different but aligned component of the conversation. Feminism clusters around questions of gender and inequality as a universal right, womanism clusters around the voices and solidarity of marginalized women of color, and class barriers intersectively illustrate the structural constraints producing identities and opportunities. Each overlapping area shows the momentum of these frameworks and their credence to critique inequality and also advocate for women's agency.

The main intersection, called "Pathways to Women's Empowerment," makes the main point of the study that empowerment in Moyes' story doesn't come from one idea but from the ongoing negotiation of race, gender, and class. The diagram elucidates the paper's critical perspective by illustrating the interconnections among various strands of feminist thought and socio-economic realities, which influence Louisa Clark's development and the novel's overarching discourse on identity and autonomy.

It is said that people with different social classes do not often get along or find common ground due to their backgrounds and the differences between their perspectives, attitudes, and beliefs. Different cultures and backgrounds affect how people turn out to be in the future, and the way individuals are raised shapes so much of their personalities, attitudes, beliefs, and the way they look at the world and themselves/others. It is believed that social class status can greatly affect quality of life because a high social class is related to increased control over resources or because a high social class is associated with greater respect and esteem in the eyes of others. It is no lie that people tend to look up to and naturally respect the upper classes way more than the lower ones.

In *Me Before You*, Moyes challenges feminist ideals and stereotypes through her main character, Louisa Clark. Louisa is an optimistic, quirky, cheerful, and resourceful young woman who is wasting her potential by being stuck in a small British village because she feels responsible for financially supporting her mother and family. Although she

once aspired to something greater, she never took the necessary risks to pursue her dreams and has become settled and convinced to be content with her simple, plain life.

From a feminist standpoint, Moyes's *Me Before You* interrogates the convergence of disability and gender. Will, a wealthy but paralyzed man, is shown as bitter and determined to take back control of his life. On the other hand, Louisa is described as a compassionate and optimistic woman who must assist him in learning how to derive meaning from his life once again. This suggests that Louisa engages in another layer of traditional gender patterns, indicating that a woman should care for and assist a man. Louisa's family life is also out of balance because she supports the family with her wages, which was expected of women. Feminist criticism also questions Louisa's development as a person; she grew out of the confines of her small town and seeks her own potential. This independence seems to occur within Louisa's connection to Will, which again suggests that women's opportunity for success has to be contingent on men. Certainly, Louisa is kind and responsible, yet her role as caregiver plays into the cultural gendered patterns of female self-sacrifice. Such culture suggests that many women can simultaneously advance a principle of equality while applying it, without a self-identified label of feminist credibility, indicating an acknowledgment that feminism is not only extreme but can also be moderate in nature.

The story begins with Louisa being laid off from her job at a small café in her village after the café's proprietor decided to close down the establishment, "Mum, I lost my job…. Frank's shutting down the café" (p. 7). She suddenly finds herself out of work and faces limited opportunities available to women from poorer backgrounds. While her mother expects her to find another job, her father points out, "There are no bloody jobs, Josie. You know that as well as I do. We're in the middle of a bloody recession" (p. 5). Louisa indicates that her family relied on her income: "They relied on my wages. Treena [her sister] earned next to nothing at the flower shop. Mum couldn't work, as she had to look after Granddad…. Dad lived in a constant state of anxiety about his job at the furniture factory" (p. 8). Louisa's aspirations, including studying fashion at college, are limited by family pressures to use her income to support the family. As she remembers, "I sat there as my parents discussed what other jobs my limited qualifications might entitle me to. Factory work, machinist, roll butterer. For the first time that afternoon, I wanted to cry" (p. 9).

Although Louisa once dreamed of more, she initially resigns herself to a modest life. Unlike feminists who actively sought wider roles in society, she settles for small jobs, evenings with her fitness-obsessed boyfriend Patrick, and the comforts of routine. Reflecting on her time at the café, she says, "I [she] liked arriving early… bringing in the crates of milk and bread from the backyard, and chatting to Frank as we prepared to open" (p. 9). To Patrick's suggestions of new jobs, Louisa responds by emphasizing how content she felt in her familiar environment: "I [she] had liked it in the café. I [she] liked knowing everything there was to know about the Buttered Bun [the café's name], and hearing about the lives of the people who came through it. I had felt comfortable there" (p. 11). Her self-perception is summed up in her words: "An ordinary girl, leading an ordinary life. It actually suited me [her] fine" (p.17).

The same thing happened with Louisa's relationship with her boyfriend of seven years, Patrick; she stayed with him because she felt settled, even though their perspectives on things and life were completely different. They basically had nothing in common. Patrick is a physical trainer who is obsessed with keeping his body in shape and training for triathlons, and Louisa, on the other hand, does not care about any of it. She says: "I was starting to lag behind. I hate running. I hated him for not slowing down" (p. 11). People with different social heritages tend to have separate preferences and perspectives on life and where they think that they belong; different mindsets and backgrounds often influence relationships. Louisa and Patrick eventually drifted apart and broke up after realizing that they were not right for each other all along, and she also tried several jobs and failed to find the right one.

The story begins with Louisa attending a job interview, expecting it to involve caring for an elderly or disabled person. In borrowed clothes that fit poorly, she attempts to appear professional but feels out of place. She is greeted by Camilla Traynor, Will's elegant mother, who gives her a cold but appraising look: "She [Camilla] withdrew her hands from mine as soon as humanly possible, but I [Louisa] felt her eyes linger upon me, as if she were already assessing me [sic]" (p. 19). One can easily imagine the significant social class gap between Louisa and Miss Traynor;

Louisa comes from a family that is just below the modest financial level, having lived her entire life in a small village with limited opportunities and resources to pursue a larger place in the world. In contrast, Miss Traynor has a privileged and prestigious family background, enabling her to achieve most of her desires in life. Louisa describes her as "middle-aged but beautiful, with expensive, precision-cut hair," and notes that she was wearing a trouser suit that Louisa guessed cost more than her father earned in a month (p. 18). Additionally, Louisa mentions: "My mother's shirt felt suddenly cheap, the synthetic threads shining in the thin light" (p. 21), which highlights the social class barrier and cultural differences between the two women.

Louisa quickly finds out that the job involves taking care of Camilla's son, Will Traynor, a wealthy and successful banker who loved adventure. Although he came from a wealthy family, he aimed to make a name for himself through hard work and success. Will was known for being charming, intelligent, and adventurous. He led an active life, skiing, climbing, racing, and traveling around the world. Will declined his fiancée's suggestion of more relaxing vacations, such as going to a spa in Bali. "I can't do those kinds of vacations," he said. "Don't knock it until you've tried it," he added after she made fun of him for "throwing yourself out of airplanes" (p. 1).

Will's life changed significantly after a car accident left him paralyzed. He didn't ride his motorcycle on a rainy day, but something hit him "coming toward him at an impossible speed" (p. 4). The accident ended his career, his engagement, and his active lifestyle. Will reflects on his situation with bitterness: "I don't do anything, Miss Clark. I can't do anything now. I sit down. I just about exist" (p. 37). Louisa notices his unhappiness when he confronts her about looking at his old pictures: "You were just looking at my pictures." "Wondering how horrible it must be to live like that and then become a cripple" (p. 35). He suffers not only from physical limitations but also from daily humiliations, health problems, and loss of freedom (p. 43). Louisa takes the job without knowing that Will plans to seek help with suicide in Switzerland. She is supposed to improve his life. However, the question remains why Camilla chose Louisa, who lacked training or professional experience, over qualified caregivers who could better meet her son's medical needs.

Considering the societal class gap between Louisa, a quirky, unprivileged, and under-skilled girl who comes from a working-class family, and Camilla Traynor, a smart and wealthy upper-class woman who lives in a castle where most of her family members lived before her. Louisa arrives at the interview in an ill-fitting suit, lacking both professional experience and confidence. Her awkwardness is revealed when, trying to lighten the moment, she remarks, "there's not much that can't be fixed by a decent cup of tea," then quickly clarifies, "I'm not suggesting the thing…the paraplegia…quadriplegia…with…your…son…could be solved by a cup of tea" (p. 22). Despite Louisa's lack of qualifications, Miss Traynor hires her not as a business decision, but as an act of desperation from a mother determined to save her son from despair. Louisa is chosen precisely for her warmth, optimism, and lively personality, qualities that professionals might lack: "It would be nice if he could think of you as a friend rather than a paid professional" (p. 29).

Louisa and Will become friends despite coming from different cultures and backgrounds. They achieve this through honesty, humor, and mutual respect. Initially, Will resists her, but Louisa becomes a source of energy for him: "You, Clark, are the only person I have felt able to talk to since I ended up in this bloody thing" (p. 242). Louisa acknowledges, "I [Louisa] know this isn't a typical love story," yet their relationship develops into love. There are many reasons why I shouldn't even be saying what I'm saying. But I do love you. "I do" (p. 315). Despite this, Will is determined to proceed with his plan to seek help for his suicidal thoughts. Louisa stays with him on his last day and expresses how much their time together has changed her. He responds, "Funny enough, Clark, mine too" (p. 351). His decision does not indicate a lack of love for Louisa; rather, it reflects that he loved her too much to let his pain determine her future.

After Will dies, Louisa finds the letter he wrote to her and the money he left for her to help her start over. He tells her to accept the possibility: "You changed my life so much more than this money will ever change yours" (p. 358). Will's gift isn't something physical; it's his faith in Louisa's potential. She learns from him how to get an

education, be independent, and feel more like herself, which starts her own journey toward finding her identity and purpose.

Diving into the history of feminism, over a century ago, the feminist movement started small with the gathering of some women who wanted to be more in life than just housewives. The US Women's Rights Convention was held in New York City, 1848. Decades after that, women started to go to college and study, but that was basically it at the time. And even though women activists were not officially part of social or political movements back then, women still made use of their gatherings as a chance to discuss and share their personal lives, issues, hopes, and dreams (Joslin, 2003). As these social gatherings continued, their popularity and influence kept growing as many women shared different experiences, which caused women's rights to be more prominent and eventually advanced. "Even as women were denied the vote and political sanction for their activities, they were, in truth, active voices in their communities and cities, in their states and in the country as a whole" (p. 1). In other words, women joined forces to enhance their roles in society and in the world, and many of them demonstrated brilliance, integrity, and self-awareness even when they were not recognized as such.

That is to say, the current paper reaches beyond the feminist agenda in *Me Before You*, as taken from a feminist perspective. It can be analyzed through its portrayal of disability and how it intersects with gender roles. Will, a once-successful man now paralyzed, is depicted as resentful and determined to regain control over his life. Louisa, in contrast, is depicted as a caring, compassionate character seeking to assist Will in achieving happiness and purpose in his life. Such a relationship may support traditional gender roles, as it suggests that a woman has a duty to provide care and emotional support for men. Louisa's father also benefited from Louisa's financial contributions towards the family expenses, which compounds the inequity and affirms the notion that women need to be providers and caregivers. Feminist theory would also take issue with how Louisa's development and growth toward freedom are depicted as tied to her relationship with Will. While she freed herself from the constraints of her small-town life, the change could suggest that a woman needs a man to be self-sufficient. On the other hand, Louisa's personality is genuine and altruistic in her efforts to aid the men in her life. This is said of Louisa not because she agrees that men are better than women nor because she is a radical feminist, but because she is a caring individual. Jojo Moyes's main character, Louisa Clark, in *Me Before You*, goes against traditional feminist ideas and gender stereotypes. Louisa is a smart, strange, and happy young woman who lives in a small British town and feels like she has to support her mother and family financially. She used to dream of a different life, but she never pursued it. In the end, she chose to live a simple and modest life. The book portrays a more moderate feminist view, suggesting that many women can hold moderate beliefs in equality and self-realization without resorting to extreme behaviors. Louisa's story illustrates the notion that women can strive to be independent and self-directed, yet balance it with compassion and connectedness, and that they don't have to reject or compete with men.

This paper explores the various feminine methods and beliefs that are bubbling under the term "feminism." It has reached its main goal of linking Jojo Moyes' novel *Me Before You* to the challenge of typical feminist perspectives, leading the novel's characters to embrace and shy away from feminism, somehow at the same time. As Louisa does not care enough to upgrade her life and social status, instead, she is perfectly fine with spending the rest of her life working in a small café in her village, but that changes after meeting Will, who encourages Louisa to take advantage of her ambition and possibilities and seek her own deserved place in the world outside her little bubble. This paper has also revealed many societal barriers and differences between Louisa, her family, Will, and his family, and how a family's background and social status can influence someone's behavior, ambitions, and goals for the future.
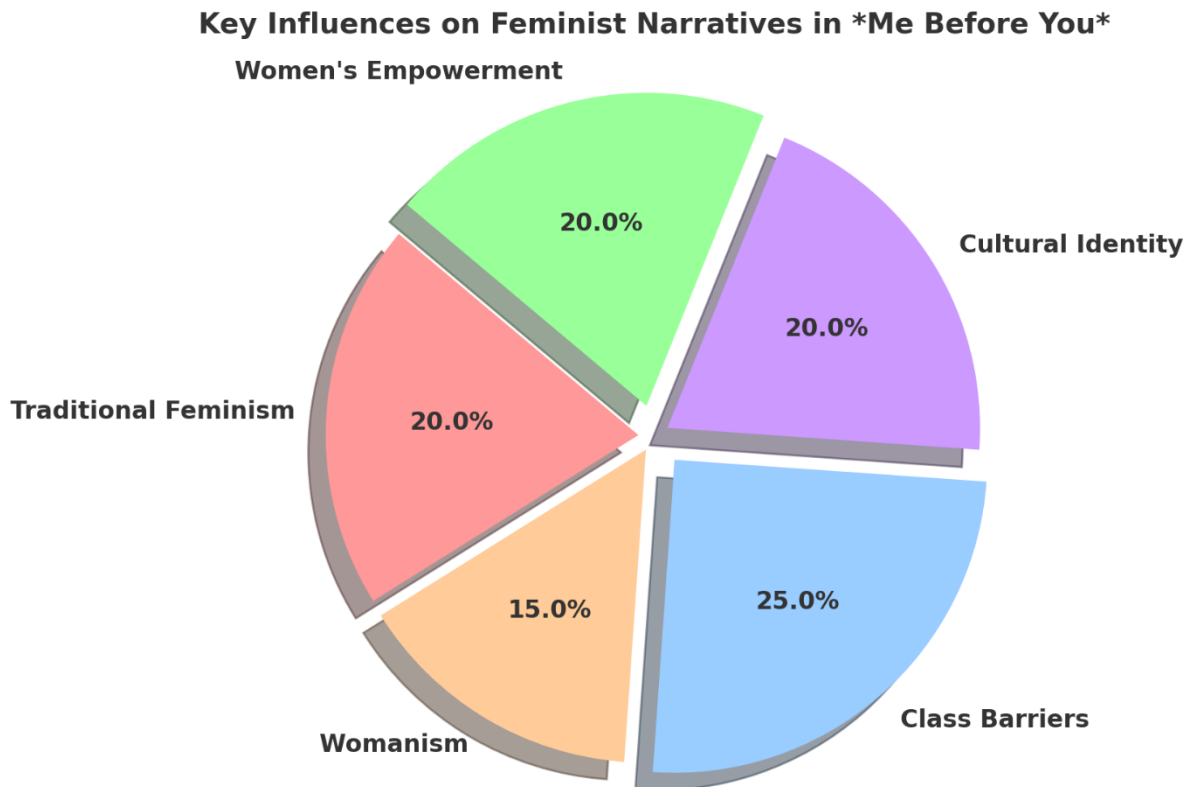
## Key Influences on Feminist Narratives in *Me Before You*



**Figure 2.** Relative Influence of Key Themes in *Me Before You*.

Figure 2 depicts the relative significance of the major themes from traditional feminism, womanism, class barriers, cultural identity, and women's empowerment in the novel. The graph demonstrates how class barriers take the highest percentage, indicating their instrumental role in Louisa Clark's path and decision-making. Cultural identity, while also important, seems somewhat evenly dispersed among the remaining themes. Although creative feminism and womanism are factually different in terms of their agendas, they intersect in advancing the broader narrative of gender and agency. The focus of investigation is women's empowerment, defined in situ as a consequence of the effect of overlapping factors. The figure conveys the primary argument of the study that empowerment in Jojo Moyes' story arises not simply from gender politics but from a confluence of social formations, culture, and agency implications.

## 6. CONCLUSION

This study examines the intersections of feminism, womanism, and social class in Jojo Moyes' *Me Before You*, aiming to elucidate how cultural heritage, familial responsibilities, and economic limitations collectively influence identity and gendered experiences. Instead of telling the usual story of freedom through rebellion, Moyes tells Louisa Clark's story as one of gradual awakening. In this story, empowerment comes not from rejecting men or tearing down social structures, but from rediscovering the self through compassion, resilience, and a growing sense of possibility. The research has shown how Moyes' book deals with both feminist ideas and criticisms of them, showing how class, family background, and cultural differences can make life harder for women. Louisa is happy with her small café job and doesn't care about moving up in the world. But after meeting Will, she is inspired to go to school, work hard, and explore all the other options open to her. Their different social and cultural backgrounds show how privilege and disadvantage affect goals and decisions.

This contribution is important because it shows how literature can help us understand feminist discourse in a more nuanced way when we look at it through the lens of social stratification and cultural identity. It also emphasizes the necessity of expanding feminist literary studies beyond Western, monolithic paradigms, towards inclusive interpretations that consider intersectional realities. Future research may enhance these insights by investigating analogous narratives within diverse cultural and linguistic traditions, or by analyzing how disability, migration, and transnational interactions further complicate the negotiation of identity and agency in contemporary fiction. In the end, Moyes' novel reminds us that the fight for women's rights and voices is not just about being against something. It is also about the quieter, more human acts of care, empathy, and courage that redefine empowerment in ways that go beyond strict ideological lines.

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