

# Breaking Free from the Shackles: Contemporary Women's Crisis and Liberation in Her Story and Like a Rolling Stone

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## Abstract

This paper focuses on two representative films, *Her Story* and *Like a Rolling Stone*, to explore the crisis faced by contemporary women of all ages from the perspective of feminist existentialism. It first analyzes the loss of "self" and "freedom" among contemporary women and reveals the constraints of the patriarchal society on women's self - construction. Then, it delves into the causes of women's dilemmas from the perspectives of the career, family, and inter - generational relationships. Finally, it analyzes the awakening and self - rescue of contemporary women. The study finds that under the long - term structural oppression of the patriarchal society, women lack subjectivity and face restrictions in self - value realization and freedom pursuit. The key for women to break free from the current predicament lies in reconstructing self - identity through self - reflection and obtaining social resources, which also requires the joint efforts of both men and women.

**Keywords:** Contemporary women; Existential crisis; Feminist films; Structural oppression; Self - rescue

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## Introduction: Obstacles on the Road of Contemporary Women's Self - construction

In the context of contemporary society's diverse cultures, women's self - realization and pursuit of freedom have become complex and profound social issues. With the continuous development of feminist thought, an increasing number of scholars and researchers have turned their attention to the dilemmas and challenges faced by women in modern society. In recent years, film and television works, as an important cultural carrier, have emerged as a crucial window for exploring women's issues through their vivid narratives and visual presentations. This paper centers on two representative film and television works, *Her Story* and *Like a Rolling Stone*, and endeavors to uncover the existential crisis confronted by contemporary women through in - depth analysis.

Existential philosophy posits that individuals possess free will and the ability to shape their unique selves through autonomous choices and specific actions, a process known as self - construction (Sartre, 1992). Self - construction is not a passive process but an active engagement where individuals define their identities, values, and life paths. However, in real - world society, women's self - construction encounters numerous obstacles. Despite the significant progress achieved in gender equality in modern times, remnants of the patriarchal society's concepts and systems persist deeply, casting a long shadow over women's self - realization.

One of the most significant challenges women face is the loss of "freedom." This loss, as Beauvoir (1949) described in *The Second Sex*, is not merely a physical or legal constraint but a complex phenomenon deeply rooted in social structures and cultural norms. In the context of the films *Her Story* and *Like a Rolling Stone*, the loss of freedom is vividly illustrated. Women find themselves hemmed in by societal expectations and gender - based stereotypes. For instance, in *Like a Rolling Stone*, Li Hong's aspirations to

pursue her dreams are stifled by the expectations of her family and society. She is expected to prioritize family responsibilities, such as taking care of her husband and daughter, over her personal desires. This external pressure forces her to suppress her own choices, sacrificing her freedom to pursue what she truly loves.

Self - realization, another key concept, refers to the process by which individuals fulfill their potential and achieve their goals. According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1943), self - realization is at the top of the pyramid, representing the highest level of human motivation. However, for women,, this process is often hindered by the patriarchal society. In the career, as depicted in both films, women encounter gender discrimination. They are more likely to be asked about their marital and child - bearing status during job interviews, which reflects a bias that assumes women's family responsibilities will interfere with their work. This discrimination restricts their access to career opportunities, making it difficult for them to achieve self - realization in the professional realm.

This paper will conduct an in - depth exploration from the following three aspects: First, it will analyze the loss of "self" and "freedom" among contemporary women and reveal the constraints of the patriarchal society on women's self - construction; second, it will explore the causes of women's dilemmas from the three perspectives of the career, family, and inter - generational relationships among women; finally, it will analyze the awakening and self - rescue of contemporary women of all ages in combination with the two films.

## The Contemporary Feminist Crisis Reflected in Her Story and Like a Rolling Stone

### *The Loss of "Self" and "Freedom" among Contemporary Women*

When analyzing the two film and television works, it can be found that the female social issues reflected mainly revolve around two key words - "self" and "freedom". Existential philosophy emphasizes that individuals have the subjectivity to make choices based on free will and shape unique selves through specific actions. Therefore, the issues of "self" and "freedom" can be summarized as their existential issues. After being influenced by the thoughts and social systems of the patriarchal society for thousands of years, the real society today still has a strong "patriarchal" undertone. There are inherent presuppositions about the identities and statuses of the two genders, and the process of women's self - construction is restricted by the inherent identity paradigms presupposed by society. This restriction makes women struggle to balance the pursuit of self - value realization and compliance with established social norms. Their inner selves are constantly in a state of conflict, which is the existential crisis faced by contemporary women.

### ***The Confusion of Women in Searching for "Self"***

In contemporary society, although the concept of gender equality is gradually taking root in people's hearts, the inertia of traditional gender culture remains strong. Scholar Li Yinhe pointed out in her in - depth research that the construction of female roles by social culture largely influences women's self - perception (Li, 2005). The expectations of elders in the family for girls to be gentle and sensible, the guidance of school education for women to be quiet and well - behaved, and the repeated reinforcement of female stereotypes in social media communication all subtly shape women's self - perception. Beauvoir mentioned in *The Second Sex* (Zheng, K. L., Trans.): "*One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman*" (Beauvoir, 1949). Society has countless evaluation criteria for women. In the long - term historical and cultural evolution, society has shaped an extremely strict and detailed standard system for the proposition of "becoming a woman". From the external appearance, women are required to follow the mainstream aesthetic paradigm, pursuing fair skin and a slender figure; in terms of words and deeds, they need to be gentle and graceful, speaking softly and refraining from so - called "rude" and "showy" behaviors; in terms of personality traits, they should possess traditional female - labeled personalities such as virtue, tolerance, and forbearance. These long - term social expectations are like an invisible mold, restricting the diverse possibilities of women's self - development. When the search for self - identity conflicts with traditional discipline, women are like being in a fog in such a complex cultural atmosphere. It is difficult for them to accurately define their identity boundaries, and they can only hover between the track of social expectations and the call of their true selves, constantly exploring but often getting lost.

Women aspire to reclaim discursive agency from the shackles of stereotypes. However, at the intersection of modernity and tradition, there is no clear paradigm to define what true independence means for women. Just like the classic line in the film *Barbie* - "We must always be flawless." At the same time, from relevant empirical research data, we can also observe the reality that contemporary women face difficulties in self - recognition due to overly high self - cognitive standards. According to *The Report on the Living Conditions of Chinese Women* (All-China Women's Federation, 2023), among the surveyed female groups, as high as 76.4% of women believe that they need to achieve excellence in multiple dimensions to win the recognition of others. These dimensions cover many aspects such as appearance, career achievements, family management, and social skills. Just like Tie Mei in *Her Story*, as a single mother who gave up her original career and started over, managing family affairs in an orderly manner, she still showed vulnerability when her article was attacked by readers. This also proves women's anxiety about the lack of subjectivity and their high demands on themselves.

### ***The "Unfreedom" of Women's Pursuit of Individual Value***

When the patriarchal society binds women to the evaluation criteria of stereotypes, women become the "objects" under the male gaze and "subordinate people", "secondary, the second sex" (Beauvoir, 1949). Thus, their resistance is regarded as "selfish", "lazy", and "unreasonable".

This is particularly evident in Chinese - style families. Some scholars' research has pointed out that in traditional Chinese culture, the concept of family - orientation is strong, and women are often regarded as appendages of the family, with their personal values being weakened (Shen, 2018). Li Hong in *Like a Rolling Stone* is the same. Although there is a strong desire deep in her heart to break the routine and pursue what she loves, the gazes and public opinion pressure from the outside world, even from her own husband, are like heavy shackles. The expectations of her original family make her suppress her choices for a long time. She sacrificed her chance to go to college for her younger brother in the family and made concessions for the lives of her husband and daughter, falling into a deep struggle and unable to build her own future. In the workplace, the plot of her daughter's job interview is also extremely realistic. In the film, when her daughter was interviewed, the interviewer asked questions such as "Are you married?" and "Do you have children?", which were not asked of male interviewees. According to the data in 2022 China Women's Workplace Status Survey Report by Zhaopin, under the same conditions, 58.1% of women believe that they will encounter disadvantages in job hunting due to their gender, while this proportion is only 17.7% among men. More than 60% of women are asked about their marriage and child - bearing status during job interviews. This data implies that people in the workplace may be more inclined to choose men and will judge women's future contributions to the position based on their marriage and child - bearing status. This situation also to a certain extent reflects that women are more likely to make sacrifices and concessions for the family, while men are relatively less affected by family responsibilities.

Society binds women's values to the "family" domain and subtly guides contemporary women to become "nannies" serving families and men through social discipline. Women constantly sacrifice themselves and even convince themselves to be part of "unpaid labor" from a moral perspective, resulting in a dilemma where women cannot see their self - value. Even if women step out of the family and try to achieve independence in society, they will still be treated differently because of such stereotypes. According to the Global Gender Gap Report 2022 by the World Economic Forum, among the 146 countries and regions surveyed, in the dimension of "economic participation and opportunity", the global average gender gap index is 0.508, still leaving much room for improvement. This means that in the economic field, including the workplace, there is still a gap between women and men in terms of obtaining opportunities. In various fields of society where more women should participate equally and resources that should be grasped fairly by women, the entry threshold for women has been raised due to such stereotypes, creating an invisible barrier and resulting in the current "unfreedom" dilemma where women cannot have the same right as men to pursue personal values equally.

### ***The Intersectional Oppression Faced by Women***

Throughout the preceding exploration of the predicaments contemporary women encounter in the realms of "self" and "freedom", as well as the barriers they confront during their pursuit of personal values, it becomes readily apparent that these issues are intrinsically linked to a complex and latent form of oppression—Intersectional Oppression. This concept was initially introduced by the black feminist scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw in her seminal 1989 paper, "*Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black*

*Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics*". Crenshaw posited that the oppression endured by women is not the outcome of a solitary factor but rather the result of the intricate interweaving and reciprocal influence of multiple social identities, including gender, race, class, sexual orientation, and age. As expounded by Smith (2022) in *"New Perspectives on Intersectionality Theory and the Multiple Dilemmas of Modern Women"*, intersectional oppression endows the dilemmas faced by women with multifaceted and intricate characteristics. This complexity renders it arduous to analyze and resolve these issues using a single theoretical framework or research perspective. Consequently, intersectional oppression offers a novel and pivotal analytical paradigm for comprehending the circumstances of contemporary women.

When delving deeper into the theoretical framework of intersectional oppression, the issues emerging at the intersection of class and gender stand out as particularly conspicuous. Women with lower socioeconomic status are confronted with more formidable challenges in both the domestic and professional spheres. Through meticulous research, Brown (2021) noted in *"Analysis of the Dilemmas of Women's Lives from the Perspective of Class and Gender"* that women from low - income brackets frequently find themselves voiceless within the family decision - making structure. To ensure the basic sustenance of their families, they are compelled to engage in high - intensity, low - paying jobs. This not only severely constricts their opportunities for self - improvement and development but also, to some degree, entrenches their social class. In the workplace, the convergence of class disadvantages and gender biases increases their likelihood of being relegated to low - paying and precarious jobs, making it difficult for them to surmount the obstacles to career advancement and achieve upward social mobility. For instance, consider Li Hong in the film *"Like a Rolling Stone"*. The overwhelming financial burden of her family forces her to abandon her personal aspirations and prioritize securing a job that can merely sustain her livelihood. Even though this job fails to fulfill her professional ambitions and lacks long - term growth potential, this case vividly exemplifies the helplessness and predicaments that women face under the intersectional oppression of class and gender.

Shifting our focus from the intersection of class and gender to that of sexual orientation and gender, we uncover oppression phenomena that demand our attention. Green (2022) clearly elucidated in *"Research on the Mental Health of Women under the Intersectional Oppression of Sexual Orientation and Gender"* that lesbian women in contemporary society are often subject to the dual oppression of heterosexual hegemony and the patriarchal system. On one hand, they are burdened by the ingrained constraints of traditional gender norms, such as the stereotypes that prescribe women to be gentle and submissive. On the other hand, they must contend with discrimination and exclusion stemming from their sexual orientation. In the family context, they may encounter incomprehension, opposition, and even emotional estrangement from their relatives. In social interactions and the workplace, they may be isolated, marginalized, and treated unjustly due to their sexual orientation. This dual - pronged oppression acts as a heavy yoke, severely impinging on their mental well - being and self - identity, and rendering every step of their pursuit of freedom and self - actualization an arduous struggle.

Moreover, the intersectional oppression between age and gender exerts a profound influence on the life trajectories of women. Through rigorous empirical research, Jones (2023) demonstrated in *"Challenges in Women's Career Development from the Intersectional Perspective of Age and Gender"* that young women entering the workforce for the first time are often stigmatized as "immature" and "unstable" due to their tender age and limited work experience. These stereotypes function as invisible barriers, impeding their access to crucial job opportunities and participation in key projects, and circumscribing their initial career start and development. Conversely, older women in the workplace are

vulnerable to "age discrimination" and are often regarded as having diminished creativity and difficulty adapting to rapidly evolving new work models. This, in turn, restricts their career progression and long - term development. In family life, young women may be pressured by their families to marry and have children at an early age, thereby forfeiting their right to freely determine their life pace and personal development paths. Older women, bound by traditional notions, may shoulder excessive family - care responsibilities, forcing them to sacrifice their personal hobbies, social lives, and even career development opportunities.

In summary, these various dimensions of intersectional oppression are interwoven and mutually reinforcing, jointly constructing an invisible yet impregnable web that ensnares modern women. This not only complicates and diversifies the dilemmas faced by women but also renders their struggle to break free from oppression and pursue equality and freedom an uphill battle, further exacerbating the survival crisis of contemporary women. Undoubtedly, in - depth analysis and reflection on this phenomenon are the linchpin for promoting gender equality and enhancing the living conditions of women.

## **The Causes of the Contemporary Feminist Crisis: Structural Oppression**

### **Economic Oppression: Women's Career Dilemmas**

Under the long-term influence of social culture, women are faced with the loss of 'self' and the restriction of freedom, and the most fundamental reason is the various constraints and oppression of the "patriarchal society". And this deep-rooted values are stacked by many factors with the development of time. An important manifestation of this dilemma in real life is the workplace environment. As a key place for women to participate in social activities and realize their personal value, there are many factors that hinder their development, which further aggravates women's dilemma. Therefore, gender discrimination and inequality in the career have deprived women of their freedom to pursue economic independence.

There is a scene in *Like a Rolling Stone* that vividly illustrates this point. Xiaoxue was very angry after the interview and went to confront the interviewer. From their conversation, we can learn that because Xiaoxue is a woman, the interviewer asked "special" questions during the interview - "Are you married? Do you have children? How old is your child?". These are not simple questions but a direct manifestation of deep - seated gender bias in the workplace. In the subconscious of the interviewer, they are worried that women will be distracted from work due to child - bearing, taking care of the family, and other matters, which will affect the economic benefits of the enterprise. Marxist - feminist theory also reveals this point. Under the capitalist mode of production, the labor division results in men occupying the core production areas and high - value positions, while women are mostly assigned to low - paying, unstable, and repetitive jobs (Hartmann, 1979). This not only causes economic inequality but also strengthens women's subordinate status in society.

However, the oppression of women's economic pursuit by society is not limited to workplace entry barriers. Issues such as "occupational segregation", "unequal pay for equal work", and "gender discrimination" are like countless shackles hindering women's career freedom. They weaken women's economic discourse power in the family and society, making it difficult for women to break free from the constraints in the economic structure of the patriarchal society and achieve true equality and freedom.

### **Cultural Oppression: Women's Dilemmas in Identity Cognition**

In *Like a Rolling Stone*, the father in the family, Sun Dayong, repeatedly mentions that he is the "head of the family" and "reasonable". It can be seen that men also have a natural dominant position in the family. In the symbolic order dominated by men, men are labeled as "rational" and "considerate of the overall situation", while women are symbolized as gentle, submissive, and beautiful objects, becoming the targets of male gaze and control in the family.

This gender stereotype is inseparable from the continuous consolidation of patriarchal social culture. Butler (1990) proposed in *Gender Trouble* that gender is a social construct, strengthened through repeated behaviors and discourses. Whether it is the "husband as the head of the wife" in ancient times, which placed women in a subordinate position to men, or today's advertisements and news media full of male - gazing perspectives, they are all constantly deepening the stereotypes of women.

Phrases such as "A mother is strong when she has a child" and "Mothers are the greatest" are well - known. However, the widespread use of this series of social languages actually reflects that society defines the meaning of women's lives from the perspective of mothers. Behind these praises is the infinite exploitation of women's "unpaid labor" by society. To become a "qualified" woman recognized by society, one needs to constantly sacrifice one's self and freedom. Society believes that women should focus on the family, which actually ignores women's independent choices and is an invisible form of exploitation. In addition, many elderly people still measure a woman's value by "having children" and constantly impose the task of "having children and raising them" on women. This series of words such as "having children and raising them", "assisting husbands and educating children", and "virtuous wives and good mothers", which carry implicit gender stereotypes, continuously hinder women's identity cognition and freedom. Under the trend of the ideology of virtuous wives and good mothers, women are constantly instilled with a single - dimensional identity perception, making them unconsciously recognize this seemingly positive value system. However, this is actually another layer of cultural oppression on women, making women mistakenly believe that unpaid labor at home is the value of their lives. Such invisible cultural oppression continuously hinders the pursuit of self - identity by new - era women.

### ***Intersectional Oppression: The Oppression of Traditional Marriage and Family Views***

After women get married, marriage and family become another cage that combines economic and spiritual oppression. Fei Xiaotong pointed out in *From the Soil: The Foundations of Chinese Society* that traditional Chinese rural society constructs its family structure centered around the patrilineal blood relationship. Men, by virtue of their dominant position in family blood inheritance and economic production, naturally become the controllers of family power (Fei, 1947). There is also a well - known term for this - the head of the family.

In the movie, Sun Dayong's key words for his self - identity are "the head of the family" and "a real man", and he naturally associates "being reasonable" with his identity, while labeling his wife, Li Hong, as "unreasonable" and "meddlesome". Just because of marriage and family, people start to take it for granted that women's contributions are obligatory. For the sake of children and the family, women have to sacrifice their careers to take care of the family. And precisely because of such sacrifices, women lose the opportunity for economic independence and have to rely on their husbands who have their own careers. This strengthens the binding force of marriage and family, making it difficult for women to leave even when they are disrespected. Even when they want to obtain freedom through divorce, more often than not, family members choose to wrong women to maintain this exploitative relationship for the sake of face and reputation. This can also easily

lead to an even worse situation - domestic violence. According to the data of the All - China Women's Federation, among the 270 million families in China, 30% of women have experienced domestic violence. Among the women who commit suicide each year, 60% do so because of domestic violence. Even in recent years, although opposing domestic violence has almost become a social consensus, domestic violence incidents still occur every day.

It can be seen that traditional marriage and family views, on the one hand, deprive women of their ability to be economically independent, making them dependent and making it more difficult for them to leave the family and start a new life; on the other hand, traditional family concepts further restrict trapped women because divorce affects their reputation. In this long - term unequal status, domestic violence may gradually occur, ruthlessly oppressing women physically and mentally.

## **The Awakening and Self - rescue of Contemporary**

In a gender - unequal predicament, many female directors "take their seats at the table" and point out the plight of women sharply from a delicate and perceptive perspective. As Director Shao Yihui pointed out in her 2023 speech: *"We lack not only female role models, but also the imagination of women's possibilities, as well as richer narratives of women's unique destinies that are different from those of men."* By creating female role models of different ages and in different situations, directors enable us to see our current situation, as well as our capabilities and goals, thus calling for the awakening and self - rescue of a wider range of women.

### ***Awakening of Self - Subjectivity***

Two works, *Her Story* and *Like a Rolling Stone*, profoundly reveal the crucial importance of self - awareness awakening for contemporary women. From the very beginning, the film *Her Story* shows a strong color of gender issues. It covers most of the currently debated gender topics, such as "male vasectomy", "menstrual shame", references to Simone de Beauvoir and Ueno Chizuko, "sexual liberation", ethical issues, structural oppression, and gender dividends. The three female characters in the film, Wang Tiemei, Xiao Ye, and Wang Moli, each experience a unique life journey. They continuously explore and grow on the path of pursuing self - value, and their process of self - awareness awakening is a gradually deepening and tortuous one.

In seeking to balance work and family, as a divorced mother, Wang Tiemei did not choose to pin her life's hopes on a new marriage. Instead, she refused her ex - husband's request for reconciliation on the pretext of "vasectomy" with a strong - woman attitude. She independently took care of household affairs, started from being a small - scale public account editor, and worked hard to support and encourage her daughter Wang Moli. She also fought against all unfair treatment for Wang Moli. At the same time, she strongly opposed the tragic narrative of single mothers. She re - examined the "single - mother" group and the individual value of women. Relying on her experiences, she wrote about her life and emotions in articles, telling readers that being a single mother does not mean losing the ability to be independent, nor does it mean a miserable life. The one - sided tragic narrative does not help solve women's dilemmas; instead, it further weakens mothers' self - subjectivity. In terms of relationships, the entanglement of her ex - husband and the pursuit of Xiao Ma, unlike the tough images of male protagonists in other movies, show the compliance of the two men through plots such as "vasectomy" and "male competition", thus reflecting Wang Tiemei's initiative in these two relationships.

Xiao Ye came from an unhappy family of origin, which led to her obvious tendency to please others in interpersonal relationships, constantly placing herself in the position of "the other". When faced with Doctor Hu's clumsy lie about her inability to enter a long - term relationship, she could only maintain the relationship by creating a false persona of a married woman having an affair,

constantly mistaking the illusion of "being loved" for her own value. Eventually, she was awakened by Wang Tiemei: "The first thing for someone lacking love is to find a way to love themselves, rather than trying to find evidence of being loved in others." Thus, she got out of the emotional quagmire.

Like a Rolling Stone is adapted from the real self - driving tour experience of Aunt Su Min from Zhengzhou. In her family and marriage, Su Min was long defined as a daughter, wife, and mother. Her life was filled with endless housework and taking care of her family. She was always sacrificing herself and waiting. She had been living under an AA system with her husband for 34 years and served as a free nanny, enduring her husband's nitpicking and accusations every day. In 2020, at the age of 56, Su Min finally made up her mind to "leave" and started a self - driving tour alone. During the journey, Su Min recorded her life by shooting short videos, and her story gradually became known to the public, attracting widespread attention and discussion.

In the film Like a Rolling Stone, Director Yin Lichuan tells the story of Li Hong through the interweaving of two timelines, highlighting the reasons and experiences of Li Hong's departure. Li Hong was diligent and hard - working. She hoped to be admitted to her dream university through the college entrance examination but was restricted by her family of origin and had to give way to her younger brother. Then, she pinned her hopes on marriage, expecting to escape the control of her family of origin by marrying far away, but was trapped in the trivialities of daily life. She waited for her daughter to grow up, for her grandson to be born, and for her children to have stable careers and settle down... So her plan to travel around the world was constantly postponed. In such a living environment, Li Hong's needs and dreams were completely ignored, and everyone took her motherly dedication for granted. However, when the self - driving tour team passed by, she discovered that there were other ways of living in the world. She realized that the solution to pursuing independence and autonomy lay within herself, not in others. When her life purpose became living for others, she finally saw herself, discovered her abilities, and regained her subjectivity.

### **Resistance to Traditional Constraints**

In reality, relying on a retirement salary of just over 2,000 yuan, Su Min lived frugally and slept in a tent tied to the roof of her car to start a journey of self - discovery. Her decision was not only a rebellion against her past life but also a challenge to traditional female roles.

In the film, Li Hong lived in an environment where traditional gender concepts were deeply ingrained. In her married life, her husband adhered to traditional ideas such as "Which woman doesn't cook at home?" and "Women are unreasonable", tying her down with household chores. He would talk to her in a condescending manner, like knocking on the window twice. Not using diapers was considered "lazy", and all her reasonable demands were seen as "unreasonable". At the same time, as an older sister, she was supposed to think about her younger brother's future and work for him for free. As a wife, she was supposed to take on all the housework and childcare responsibilities. As a mother, she was supposed to take care of her daughter's child and pay attention to every minor redness on the child's body... All these "shoulds" had a long - standing origin. It seemed that the existence of all women was only to meet the needs of the family and be the appendages of men, confined to the position of "the other".

However, Li Hong did not always passively endure this unfair situation. As time passed, her self - awareness gradually awakened, and she began to challenge these traditional concepts and her predetermined fate. She resolutely chose to leave home, escaping the expectations of society for women as traditional gender roles. From the perspective of existential feminism, Li Hong's departure was a brave pursuit of freedom and self. She no longer wanted to be bound by traditional concepts, nor was she willing to be a subservient of the family. Instead, she yearned to be the master of

her own life and define her existence and achieve self - value through this choice.

### **Guidance for the New Generation of Women**

For awakened women, in addition to resistance, an even more important way of self - rescue is to guide the new generation of women. Wang Tiemei's educational concept in Her Story is that she does not want Wang Moli to be a "lady". She believes that "the term 'lady' should have been eliminated long ago." Her most important educational concept is "to be upright, brave, and well - read". Under such education, Wang Moli has become a child who does not accept gender discipline and moral kidnapping and can see her true inner feelings.

At first, Wang Moli was arranged by the teacher to be an audience member because she clapped well. She dared not refuse because she didn't want to cause trouble and cared about the opinions of teachers and classmates. However, after becoming a female drummer, she finally bravely expressed her feelings to the teacher and refused to continue being an audience member. After her first stage performance, she wrote in her composition: "I thought I liked drumming, but when I stood on a big stage and completed a performance, I felt like I had just completed a task. I still prefer to be an audience member." When her father wanted to reconcile with Wang Tiemei by using the fact that he had raised Wang Moli hard in the past, Wang Moli replied, "You're my dad. Isn't it right for you to take care of me?" to avoid moral kidnapping and her father's interference in their current life. When Zhang Jiaxin said in a condescending manner, "I forgive you. You're pitiful," Wang Moli replied, "I think you're ridiculous. I'm upright, brave, and well - read. What's pitiful about me?" Under the guidance of Wang Tiemei and Xiao Ye, Wang Moli has unconsciously undergone a transformation. She has truly become a woman who follows her true self rather than social discipline and others' approval. She has her own self - subjectivity, and she herself is a resistance to the past and tradition, as well as a builder of the "new game" in the future.

### **Conclusion**

From the two works Her Story and Like a Rolling Stone, we can glimpse the dilemmas of contemporary women of all ages from the perspective of female existentialism. Under the long - term structural oppression of a patriarchal society, women lack subjectivity, unconsciously placing themselves in an object position and failing to see their self - value and capabilities. In society, social resources have long been occupied by men, squeezing the development space of women. These two factors together have caused the aforementioned dilemmas of women's lack of "self" and "freedom".

So, how can women break through structural oppression? Anthony Giddens mentioned in his other book Modernity and Self - Identity: *"In the context of modernity, the formation of self - identity is increasingly becoming an active construction process of the acting subject. They plan their ideal selves and their development based on a large amount of knowledge from abstract systems."* It can be seen that the key for women to get out of the current dilemma lies in reshaping self - identity through self - reflection and mastering social resources. At the same time, Simone de Beauvoir also pointed out that getting out of the dilemma cannot rely solely on women; it requires the joint efforts of both men and women.

Therefore, feminist films such as Her Story and Like a Rolling Stone serve as media platforms to convey female voices to the public. Feminist film theorist Mary Ann Doane criticizes that *"female films always associate female pleasure with the construction of masochistic femininity"*. Traditional films are used to placing women in the position of "being stared", which are *"a kind of writing that uses female images but not for women"* (Mary Ann Doane, 2006). The revolutionary nature of Her Story and Like

a Rolling Stone is that the protagonists in the two films "no longer revolve around the sexual and blood relationship with men, but are full of subjective self-reflection and growth" (Chen, 2025), and become "female writing" in the real sense. So, just like what Laura Mulvey believes, "film is not only a tool for women to be oppressed by images, but also a tool for liberation by changing conventions and reorganizing forms". Nowadays, female films have entered the public view and popular culture. Women pick up "films" as the tool to break the inequality of the traditional patriarchal society in order to liberate themselves. This also reflects women's urgent hope to break the traditional gender power structure, which has a profound impact on promoting gender equality, which has a profound impact on promoting gender equality.

Looking to the future, women face both hopes and challenges on the road to pursuing equality and freedom. From a social perspective, with the continuous progress of society and the gradual change of people's concepts, the concept of gender equality will take root more deeply in people's hearts. More and more people will realize that gender equality is not only the right of women but also an inevitable requirement for social development. Governments and social organizations will increase their support and promotion of gender equality, formulate more perfect laws, regulations, and policy measures, eliminate gender discrimination, and create a more equitable development environment for women.

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## Author Contributions

Xianlong Wang and Mingzhen Wu are co-first authors.

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