

*Barbie: A Tale of Gender Inequality*

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For many years woman have been dealing with being seen as the inferior gender and being treated as such by men. They have been fighting for equal rights from being able to vote to job opportunities and equal pay. While years of work has led to success in some areas others are still being fought for to this day through protest, political movements, and media. There have been a multitude of movies portraying the struggles of women throughout time one of the most recent, movies to do this is Greta Gerwig's *Barbie*.

*Barbie*, released in 2023, was a surprising film that uniquely portrayed a number of gender issues, as well as a few other diversity issues, faced in our current time. When first hearing about the release of this film I initially thought that it would just be another live action kids film with no important real world message behind it. After first hearing peoples initial thoughts about it and how they had felt about the message it sent, particularly woman, the film piqued my interest. After watching this film, I see now that it is a tale about the real world issues that women face in their day to day lives in regard to gender equality. Following Barbie, who is also referred to as Stereotypical Barbie, we see an interesting perspective on these issues as she believes Barbie, as a whole, has accomplished the goal of influencing the real world to eliminate gender inequality. The Barbie's and Ken's are seen living in Barbie Land, a place where gender roles and stereotypes seem to be reversed as the woman are in power and the men are simply there to serve the woman. This gives us an interesting perspective as Barbie and Ken travel to the real world and are faced with new and completely different interactions and issues. Being able to see how differently the two are treated in the real world compared to Barbie Land and each of their feelings to it helps to get their message across to everyone.

We see many examples of various concepts that have been discussed in our text, *Understanding the Psychology of Diversity*, throughout this movie, with concepts such as gender

stereotype and gender bias are seen through the entire length of the film. One concept that I found most prevalent in was hostile sexism, “a set of attitudes that regards women as inferior to men, assigns women to traditional and subordinate roles, considers women as sexual objects, and believes that women are capable of and ultimately interested in controlling men through female sexuality or feminist ideology” (Blaine & Brenchley, 2017, p. 124). One of the first scenes that is a good example of hostile sexism is when Barbie and Ken first get enter the real world. As they make their way down the boardwalk they are both stared at, however, unlike Ken Barbie receives sexual remarks, is hollered at and called nicknames such as “blondie” by men, and is whistled at as well. Here we can see the first instance of the difference between how Ken receives the real world compared to how Barbie does. Ken is seen as happy and clam and is enjoying the attention he is getting while Barbie is noticeably uncomfortable and feels “ill-at-ease.” Ken even goes on to state “I feel appreciated but not ogled. Mine has no undertone of violence.” To which Barbie replies “mine very much has an undertone of violence” (Gerwig, 2023, 00:29:26).

Although Barbie just arrived in the real world and is simply going down a boardwalk she is already being sexualized and feels as if their actions have violent undertones. This is a good example of how easily hostile sexism happens and how common it is. The sense goes on and we see Barbie continue to be sexualized by the men they come in contact with from construction works making sexual comments to a random beach goer slapping her bottom, to being sexually talked about by the police. This scene as a whole shows how women are constantly looked at as sexual objects to men and how this makes women feel. These scenes, as well as others throughout the movie, also shows how Ken does not have to deal with these same issues and instead shows how he is respected by those around him instead.

Another concept that I seen within the film is the glass ceiling metaphor which suggest “that invisible factors prevent women from advancing to the highest level of their chosen occupation” (Blaine & Brenchley, 2017, p.141). While there were a few examples of the glass ceiling metaphor I think the biggest example was when Barbie was brought to Mattel’s headquarters and taken into the boardroom with all of the executives who are all men. We see barbie look around at all of the executives and ask to meet the woman in charge or the CEO. This causes confusion amongst the executives and the CEO raises his hand which in turn confuses Barbie. She then list other positions under the CEO which also turn out to be men. One of the men, Arron a lower level associate, states “... I’m a man with no power, does that make me a woman?” (Gerwig, 2023, 00:47:18). This causes Barbie to ask if there’s any woman in charge, the CEO tells her that there was a woman CEO in the 90’s and “another one at some other time” he also goes on to state that they even have gender neutral bathrooms ending his speech, that attempts to prove women are equal at Mattel, by calling Barbie a “Jezebel” and telling her to do what he wanted. I believe this is a good example of the glass ceiling metaphor as even a company, whose goal is to make toys depicting women in power to inspire young girls, is run by men with little to no influence from women. This furthers the point that men don’t believe women are able to preform in positions of power as well as men even no matter what the company does.

These are just some of the examples of how *Barbie* depicts some of the concepts we have learned about regarding gender issues. I believe that this film did a great job on finding a new way to show some of these issues and made it so it was easy for everyone, not just women, to understand. Showing how both genders react to a sudden change in gender roles and how it makes both Ken and Barbie feels can give men a better idea of how women might feel due to this

inequality. Besides being able to portray these issues the film still felt fun, like Barbies are intended, while being able to send the important message that Barbie has been trying to send since their beginning.

References:

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