

A Study on the Reflection of Feminism in Movies

- Taking Barbie as an Example

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Abstract: Feminism demands gender equality rather than enslavement of others. The film "Barbie" by renowned female director Greta Gerwig sparked a pink wave in 2023, attracting numerous audiences from all over the world. The film showcases the feminine power of female characters in the film through the shaping of character images, changes in camera style, and transformation of perspective. This article analyzes feminism in Barbie films from several perspectives, including the portrayal of specific character images and their reasons, camera styles, the manifestation and reasons for specific perspective transitions, and the background analysis of female directors. Through the exploration of the entire film, it can be seen that compared to simple visual conflicts, the film hides many details behind it, ranging from the character's dressing style or scene layout to the reason why the camera provides diverse perspectives. By analyzing the feminism in Barbie, explore the means and methods behind the film to embody feminism.

Keywords: feminism, character images, camera styles, perspective transitions, female director.

1. Introduction

Feminism, also known as feminism, aims to criticize social relationships. The purpose of feminist theory is to understand the essence of inequality and focus on sexual politics, power relations, and sexual consciousness. The term "feminism" has been passed down for many years from ancient times to the present and has also been explored by many scholars. In the film industry, this term also applies to some films without exception. In July 2023 this year, the Barbie film swept across the Chinese Mainland with a wave of pink. The director of this story, Greta Gerwig, was inspired by the Barbie doll products founded by Mattel. With Barbie doll products sweeping the world, Mattel has extended the Barbie doll industry chain to Barbie doll animated movies. In this expensive film, Gerwig breaks through traditional film models and explores women in feminist and patriarchal societies, as well as their identities and social status. In the film, a large amount of pink visual impact and minimalist identity settings may seem simple and easy to understand, but upon delving deeper into their underlying meanings, one can discover Gerwig's portrayal of feminism. The multiple character settings, camera switching, background art arrangement, and other important and fragmented techniques are perfectly pieced together, making the entire film seemingly simple but profound in conveying the feminism that the film wants to showcase.

Greta Gerwig's film "Barbie Dolls" (2024) depicts the constantly changing status between groups represented by Barbie and Ken, ultimately achieving peace. Barbie dolls have also become themselves in this constant change. In this paper, the author will argue that Gerwig uses cinematography and a series of comparisons to provide a position of gazing at women from variable perspectives, such as male and female perspectives.

By analyzing cinematography and a series of comparisons, as well as perspective transformation, the aim is to explore how feminism in the Barbie film is reflected, how to obtain feminism from the audience's perspective, and how feminism is presented in the film.

2. Barbie

Barbie movies mainly depict the unfair treatment women receive in the real world through the transition between the real world and Barbie's ideal world, as well as the story of Barbie's advocacy for gender equality after growing up. The film begins with "all Barbie and Ken" living in a carefree paradise. Barbies have no worries, dress up beautifully every day, live a refined and orderly life, and they don't even have to think about the meaning of life or death. Playing by the seaside in the sun during the day, singing and dancing outside the room in the face of a bonfire at night. At work, Barbie can excel in any profession and receive any award, even the Nobel Prize. Then one day, Barbie found herself flattened and even began to ponder the meaning of death. She longed to explore the truth and entered the real world. In the real world, Barbie witnessed the real-life situation of women, such as the fact that company executives are all men and women are not respected by men. After seeing the charm of a patriarchal society, Ken returned to the Barbie world and transformed it into Ken's world. When Barbie returned to her world and saw this scene, she had a desire to change gender inequality in her heart.

3. The Shaping of Feminism in Movies

3.1. Character Shaping

The opening of the movie is like what the audience sees. The entire movie of Barbie is filled with a pink atmosphere. Pink, as the main tone of the movie, symbolizes the pursuit of freedom, personality, and self, while also stimulating the audience's imagination. At the beginning of the film, it is explained that Barbie, who lives in a carefree world, is the ruler of this world. As the protagonist of the movie, Barbie was endowed with a mature image by Ruth Moscow Handler [1]. She has exquisite dressing, perfect hairstyle, strong learning ability, strong empathy, and strong organizational skills. In addition, she loves life and is good at trying various professions, such as astronauts, engineers, actors, hosts, and so on [2]. Her image of Barbie was portrayed as an almost perfect woman. She possesses the power that belongs to women. The perfect image of Barbie is vividly portrayed in terms of clothing, the early patriarchal society, figure, personality, and other aspects, laying the foundation for feminism in the opening of the film. She represents a progressive woman who has received higher education, been baptized by feminism, and awakened to modern and critical thinking. The subtle influence of Barbie has liberated the self-awareness of many female audiences, and is also overturning and subverting the stereotypical impression of women in patriarchal society, arousing resonance among many female audiences.

However, when the movie excessively beautifies Barbie in the Barbie world, it triggers reflection from the audience. In the Barbie movie, many different female characters are portrayed, in addition to the male and female protagonists Barbie and Ken, there are also many interesting Barbie characters, such as the eccentric Barbie and so on. These different types of Barbies represent different groups of women in reality. In the film, they have been living a routine life since waking up in the morning, pretending to have water in their cups, pretending to have breakfast to eat, and different Barbies are

warmly greeting each other. The movie seems to depict Barbie's unchanging life in the Barbie world, but in reality, it constantly reveals the women in this era, living a life of oppression and restraint. The rapid portrayal of their lives in movies is all about women being stared at and completing what they should do in the right positions. Barbie's room has an architectural style with no walls on all sides, but her actions are all monitored under the trained gaze. Their lives may seem very exquisite and beautiful, but in reality, they dress up to show others, which oppresses them and makes it difficult for them to breathe. They can only force themselves to smile. This is how movies reflect the survival situation of women in modern society.

The image of Barbie in the utopian world of the entire film contrasts sharply with the image of the real world. In the utopian world, Barbie is a sweet girl, while in the real world, she appears dull and even ignorant. The design of this image of "Barbie" is to do various household chores in a toy house, which cultivates and cultivates the stereotype of "women doing household chores" for young girls who are not yet mentally mature. Wearing high heels at all times is also because in the eyes of men, high heels can showcase women's temperament, and designers do not care about the harm of high heels to women. After understanding these things, Barbie still yearned to become a living woman because she found the last piece of the puzzle as a woman in this series of events. That's to be yourself, a woman who doesn't care about her appearance when she wants to wear anything, a woman who can loudly say to go to the hospital to see a gynecological disease.

3.2. Style: Camera Interpretation Pays Tribute to Classic Details

In the Barbie film, director Geweig focuses on gender reflection and women's rights, while also depicting the oppression and injustice faced by women under patriarchy, incorporating a large number of themes of gender inequality, presenting a thought-provoking social concern. In the use of lenses, there are many shots, close-up shots, etc. For example, the most touching scene is when Barbie doll first arrives in the real world, sitting on a bench and turning her head to see an elderly woman. She blurted out, "You're really beautiful." The old woman confidently replied, "Of course I know." Yes, even if we're old, with wrinkles on our faces, a figure, and old age, as long as we think we're beautiful, we're the most beautiful. " Many shots contrast women under patriarchy with women in a society dominated by women, emphasizing the perspective and importance of gender equality [3].

In movies, this art form is divided into two paths from the beginning, one is the Lumiere Brotherhood Road, and the other is the George Merry Love Road. The Road of the Lumiere Brothers focuses on describing reality, with the protagonist choosing to face the bleak world or ending directly, such as the photographer choosing natural light instead of filters to capture the authenticity of the world; And George Merry's path of love focuses on pursuing romance, creating a visual romantic atmosphere or illusion, giving people a surreal feeling. The camera style of Barbie is undoubtedly closer to the latter. Therefore, in the movie "Barbie", the visual plastic feel of art props, special effects, as well as the exaggerated sense of characters and the overwhelming sense of colors have formed a complete expression style [4].

In the Barbie movie, the "real world" is parodied, while on the contrary, the "Barbie world" is exaggerated and shaped. It is easy to see that everything in the "Barbie world" is full of fantasy, without any realistic atmosphere. When the audience realizes that this is a "plastic flavored" visual style, the opposite truth will be revealed. In addition to its own elements, many classic movies also integrate some plot segments into the film, presenting a rough and mixed texture that is in line with the overall tone of the film. Barbie adopts a posture of appropriation and parody that is completely different from the creative methods of other films, which also allows it to better interpret the meaning and value of women in classics [5].

3.3. Analysis of Perspective Conversion

The Barbie movie constructs a contrast and deconstruction between reality and the utopian world at the narrative level, using the transformation of three gaze perspectives to highlight the awakening of Barbie's "female consciousness". This movie vividly presents three types of gaze processes from being stared at by women to breaking their gaze and ultimately returning to it, which also means that women gradually find themselves and control their sovereignty. When Barbie dolls are gazed upon, she is depicted as the perfect commodity for men, possessing a perfect figure and appearance. She can even handle all positions and is the winner of life [6].

When Barbie returned to the real world and experienced various realities that were opposite to her, her gaze began to shatter. After arriving in the human world, Barbie's sexy body design caught the attention of passersby, and her innocent self still believed that these were all harmless. But when she found her owner, the little girl didn't hide her disgust and told her that Barbie toys were just tools for brainwashing women in patriarchal society [7]. Gradually, Barbie realized that the only thing worth using violence was to break some deep-rooted stereotypes, and when attempting to build a wall with rigidity to block flexibility, only the coexistence and combined force of rigidity and flexibility could have enough strength to break the wall. Therefore, it was only after witnessing Allen, as a male, risking his life for the plight of women that humanity and Barbie realized the need to unite and crush the patriarchy they were trying to infiltrate.

The third appearance of perspective transformation was when the founder of Barbie doll communicated with Barbie doll about her background and design concepts, as well as her views on becoming human. Barbie witnessed with her pure white eyes the various difficulties and injustices women face in society, all of which are responsibilities imposed by the emergence of male hormones in patriarchy. The reason why Barbie dolls awaken is not because of the little girl who has already detested Barbie toys, but because of the girl's mother. There are no other reasons, it is precisely because her life has been arranged by various male environments: she has to send her children to school before work, pick them up after work, her husband is learning another language at home, and she can only do boring front-end work at a company famous for female toys. She, who is bound and objectified by various responsibilities, cannot even understand that she is a female daughter. So only she saw the Barbie doll abandoned by her daughter, which was similar to her own predicament. Only she could resonate with Barbie and give her awakened thoughts.

3.4. Background of Female Directors

Greta Gerwig rose to fame in the late 2010s, but it wasn't until 2017 that she began her directorial career and accumulated a global reputation. In her early career in personal film production, Gerwig has had multiple Oscar certified projects, and she has an unstoppable dream.

It is not difficult to see that Greta Gerwig is a staunch believer in empowering women [8]. Just watching her movies is enough to prove how this actor and director attempts to push the limits and elevate the status of Hollywood women metaphorically and literally. Firstly, her highly acclaimed films "Miss Bird" and "Little Women" both revolve around female actors, and the upcoming "Barbie Doll" follows in their footsteps [8]. In 2017, Gerwig made her debut as a solo director and joined a small club composed of women nominated for Best Director at the Academy Awards, hoping to inspire more women to join the team.

Gerwig focuses on bringing the life experiences of young women onto the big screen - something that is missing from the hustle and bustle of growth stories in the eyes of men. Gerwig does not intend to only produce films centered around women. She pointed out that as a writer and now as a director, her goal is to tell stories about women, with the main emotional relationship being the relationship between two women [9].

She is adept at forming a "trinity" through the use of performance, screenwriting, and director connections, which is a very unique way of filming and also makes her stand out among American female directors. Even in setting similar situations or scenes, by analyzing women's consciousness, she can still process the scene more naturally and with vitality. Therefore, the composition of Gerwig's filming methods, as well as the emergence of her filming themes and the reflection of the current social environment, are also a reflection of the arrival of outstanding American female authors and a direction for examining and examining teenagers.

Johnston adopted a Marxist approach to cinema, believing that all films are ultimately products of the existing economic relations system. This is the environment in which a female director operates. She wants to make movies in her way and write her scripts, but this path is often full of compromises. However, she is also creating a new story in her way - how a woman became a director. Greta used the words of her character in the movie "Little Women" and quoted a line from another novel by the original author, "The Blooming Rose": Women have thoughts and souls, not just emotions; Women have both ambition and talent, not just beauty. The author is very tired of people saying that women can only be born for love [10].

4. Conclusion

Since its release in 2023, the Barbie movie has broken the traditional animation style, with seemingly obvious lines that are actually thought-provoking. Unlike traditional style films, Barbie is exquisitely crafted from its visuals to character closeups, creating an ideal world that contrasts sharply with the brutality of the real world and carries a satirical connotation. At the same time, it is the strong contrast between the utopian world and the real world that awakens Barbie's female consciousness and begins to reflect on the rights and status of women in the world. The ending of the movie achieves a beautiful ending of gender equality, and it is also the director's call for equal treatment of men and women in both utopian and real worlds. There are many foreshadowings in the movie, such as the surprised reaction of other Barbies when they learn that Barbie suddenly becomes flat footed, Barbie walks on high heels all day, and so on, all depicting the stereotypical influence on women. Satirizing the world's injustice towards women in a seemingly humorous art style. There are many filming techniques in movies, such as switching between three perspectives when creating Barbie's image, constantly hinting at Barbie's growth, and so on. In addition, Greta Gewig, the female director of this Barbie film, is also worth mentioning. She has shot many feminist films through her own understanding of the situation of women in contemporary society and the treatment she receives from the world. With a novel and breakthrough narrative perspective and visual portrayal, she is one of the influential female directors in modern times. The movie "Barbie" deserves careful evaluation and scrutiny.

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