

Contemporary Film and Women's Rights: Using the Movie Barbie as a Case Study

Youran Ma^{1,a,*}

¹RDFZ Xishan School, Beijing, 100193, China

a. 2016150198@jou.edu.cn

*corresponding author

Abstract: The paper studies contemporary film and feminism, and it uses *Barbie* as an example. It provides a new perspective on women's rights based on film analyzing. It also discusses over expression and movements of feminism and explains that how the movie has been connected to feminism. The paper based on certain plots in the film, also detailed analysis has been done. This movie directly reflects the real situation of women under the patriarchal system. At the same time, Barbie herself is an image that encourages women to grow up, face the real world bravely and accept themselves. The film conveys an optimistic, confident, and various image of women, encouraging women to pursue their dreams and happiness without being restricted by society and gender. It is undoubted that the film provides people with an opportunity to think about gender equality issues and show that equal rights is the thing that everyone should strive for.

Keywords: *Barbie*, feminism, gender, equal rights

1. Introduction

The movie *Barbie* has brought out many discussions ever since it has been released. People pay attention to how the movie represents feminism, and how it shows importance of equal rights. The study also based on others research over feminism before. And it also concentrates on expression of feminism in popular films. There were studies about film and feminism too. Some of them were related to gender imbalance not only in film representations but also in film history [1]. Some of them were about how globalization had influenced on female in Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Korea [2]. And some of them focused on how the film represented women working for social revolution and change [2]. However, most of them were years ago, not recent.

2. The Promotion and Expression of Women's Rights in the Real World

Feminism shows the struggle of equality between men and women in society, also for social justice [3]. However, in some cases, its purpose simply turns to oppose men, and hate men. This is a manifestation of radical feminism. It maintains women's rights by stigmatizing men [3]. In their opinions, everything that stops women from progressing come from men. So, only without men can women succeed or be the best of themselves. Furthermore, in Iran, women have been voiced for their rights since September in 2022 [4]. They have been through many obstacles, like heavily suppressed by Iran's political system, and they have never got the attention from authorized institutions [4]. However, they have reached success by containing celebrities and students and others in their

movement. Moreover, they not only take advantage of social media, but also get support from senators and other countries. In the end, they are enabled to express their thoughts and it pushes the feminism forward. What's more, there are some female writers in Africa, promoting feminism in Africa. In their products, people discovered changes in reception on selves, feminism and cognition of modernity [5]. This is a form which is more comprehensive and diverse. So, that is why it has also challenged traditional practices of the patriarchy society. Feminism also appears in teenage pregnancy. There are so many cares and attention for the girl who has been pregnant, and it probably dues to feminism [6]. Researchers who research in a female perspective may lead them to more concern about women. However, pregnancy also has impact on male teenagers. That is the reason for why male should not be neglected.

One type of feminism is called "popular feminism" [7]. It refers to the process of celebrities speaking on social media and mainstream media to spread feminism. One good example of this is MeToo movement, supported by Heard in 2018. She posted an article on The Washington Post and reviewed her own experience of sexual violence. She also wrote the extreme skepticism and opposition she received when she spoke the thing out. Nevertheless, this also led to widespread attacks on feminism, even beyond traditional spaces like family and so on. Some attackers were defined as misogynists. Furthermore, this event also kindled the narrative that men were victims of feminism.

3. Case Study

3.1. Case Description

"*Barbie*" is a fantasy film directed by Greta Gerwig, starring Margot Robbie and Ryan Gosling. The film tells the story of a doll living in the Barbie Kingdom who was expelled for being "not perfect" and embarked on an adventure in the real world. As of August 23, 2023, the North American box office revenue of the movie "*Barbie*" directed by Greta Gerwig has reached 575.4 million US dollars, earning more in 2023 than any movie in history.

3.2. Case Analysis

In this movie, Barbie is an image that encourages women to grow up, face the real world bravely and accept themselves. There are some famous lines in this movie, like "You are supposed to stay pretty for men, but not so pretty that you tempt them too much or that you threaten other women", "You are supposed to like being a mother, but do not talk about your kids all the time", "You have to say you want to be healthy, but you have to be thin." Barbie uses lines to break the rules and regulations for women in real life. Women should not be ambitious, should take care of the family and so on. Many things have been integrated into life. A woman only belongs to her mother's family and her husband's family, and she is an accessory to them, which has never been "her" herself. Women are restricted to the domestic sphere. Barbie not only breaks women's "motherhood", but also shows the possibility of women doing anything, they can be a president, or they can be an actress, or they do not have to be presidents or actors. It breaks the traditional social stereotype of women and provides a diverse definition of social roles for women [8]. The film conveys an optimistic, confident, and various image of women, encouraging women to pursue their dreams and happiness without being restricted by society and gender. It is true that the fourth wave of feminism is based on social media, since there are a huge number of viewers commenting, praising, and analyzing this movie on social media, showing their ideas of feminism [9].

The importance of feminism is to point out and alleviate women's weak positions in nowadays' society [9]. This movie directly reflects the real situation of women under the patriarchal system. For example, the little girl named Sasha. As Barbie first appears in the real world, she mistakenly

considers Sasha as the little girl that has been connected to her all the time. Therefore, she talks to Sasha and is badly hurt. Since Sasha has a really bad expression towards Barbie, regarding Barbie as a figure whom is so perfect that makes women think bad of themselves and even sets feminism back 50 years. She describes Barbie as stereotypical. As for Sasha, Barbie is something that is made by men depending on their own aesthetic and requirements to a female figure. It is a little ironic that Barbie is mainly for the female market, but Mattel's executives are all men. Obviously, gender stereotypes still exist and affect women's career progressions [10]. Also, there are only 29 percent of senior management positions are consisting of women [10]. So, Sasha boycotts Barbie, because she thinks Barbie is an output of masculinity, so if she likes Barbie, she will be manipulated by men and deny her own value. From their conversation, people can see that more and more girls start stop playing Barbie because they think Barbie is too perfect to reflect girls in the real world. This is purely a product of a male perspective and adds to the anxiety of women in the real world. It has something to do with the absence of women in management. As Sasha grows up, she gradually realizes the strictness and disrespect of society towards women. Also, for instance, characters that include pregnancy are not sold as toys because people think it's weird. She hates misogyny, and she knows the necessity to change it, but she doesn't know how to do that. Thus, she hates everything that is feminine, like Barbies and high-heeled shoes and so on. It is a way for her to protect herself, though it makes her look like a misogynist and a bit extreme. However, Sasha is a true portrayal of some women in the real society. Because they do not know and have no ability to change the reality, they can only protect themselves and other women's rights in ways those are a little extreme. I have to say, Sasha is brave enough in a society where many women are afraid to speak up for their own rights.

When Barbie finds the real world unknowable and terrifying, the world's evil towards women, she finds herself flawed. Compared to the Barbie land, where all women are perfect, a female-dominated society, she does pass through a big drop. Most importantly, even the perfect "Classic Barbie" cannot always be "Classic Barbie" after entering the real world. She developed self-awareness, anxiety, and the powerlessness, depression. This is actually the progress of the role of Barbie, telling us that women do not have to be perfect, and also allow themselves to be imperfect [8]. The most valuable thing is that Barbie chooses to become a woman after going through a series of self-finding processes, because she sees the strength and charm of women. This also tells women that they don't have to live to please others, but to live for their own dreams and for themselves. Many people consider that Barbie has made them dare to wear pink in their lives, although pink has always been defined as embarrassing and inappropriate.

4. Discussion

This paper claims that women's rights and men's rights should go toward equal rights. Instead of hegemony of any gender. Blindly clamoring against male power, and even ruling male power with women's rights by oppressing male power thinking, is not conducive to the development of positive and healthy women's rights [11]. It is undoubted that women need to reflect on feminism itself. Women nowadays should identify with and pursue to be an independent modern intellectual woman, refuse to become an old-fashioned woman under the oppression of feudal central male power burdened with traditional gender stereotypes. Obviously, feminism should call for women's rights and power, achieve equal rights, and ultimately achieve gender equality. Some extreme feminists realize that they are extreme, but still do not change. Most of them have a strong revenge mentality due to their own experience of discrimination or oppression. Therefore, when talking about issues such as gender inequality, they advocate transferring the oppression of women to men, which is an obvious act of revenge. Some expressions of extreme feminism are as following. They only want to enjoy rights and do not want to undertake obligations. Because of their own physiological disadvantages, they regard that they should occupy the natural moral high ground in social status,

family power, gender relations and working environment. Another expression is that they oppose and negate all gender symbols with traditional characteristics, especially fully negate family-type women who sacrifice their own personal interests for the family or marriage, denying the perfect women in the traditional view who actively contribute to the family, caring for the family and other characteristics. Also, they express a strong demand for the supremacy of women's personal benefits. Equality between men and women is not the ultimate construction of female hegemony ruling order, but equal rights, men and women under the same blue sky, constitute a complete human. Rational feminism, from advocating "feminist supremacy" to the construction of equal rights between men and women; from the pursuit of absolute equality, to the commitment to relative equality; from advocating the role of dominator, to the construction of a harmonious culture of coexistence between men and women.

5. Conclusion

The movie has shown feminism in different ways. In this movie, Barbie represents an image that encourages women to grow up, face the real world bravely and accept themselves. Barbie not only breaks women's "motherhood", but also shows the possibility of women doing anything, they can be a president, or they can be an actress, or they do not have to be presidents or actors. The movie not only breaks down social stereotype about women, but also provides a diverse definition of social roles for women. The importance of feminism is to reflect and moderate women's disadvantageous positions in nowadays' society. Barbie directly reflects the real situation of women under the patriarchal system. This film has actually been progressing of the role of Barbie, telling women that they do not have to be perfect, they can make mistakes and be "imperfect". Nevertheless, future researchers can make more detailed research on the following aspects. For instance, they can pay attention to analyzing the reaction of audiences in different countries through film reviews and comments. What's more, they can also do in-depth interviews with different kinds of women about the film and feminism.

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