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A Content Analysis on the Portrayal of Men in the Film "Barbie"

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Background: The portrayal of gender in popular culture has become a prominent debate in the contemporary media landscape. A drawback of such debates is the imbalance of focus on gender as a whole, which favours more on the depiction of women. As the gender war in mass media is raging, it's timely to explore how men are portrayed in the light of the gender movement.

Objective: This study aims to examine how men and masculinity are represented in Barbie, with a particular focus on gender roles, power relations, and stereotypes.

Methods: Under the qualitative research approach, a content analysis was conducted using the film as the primary data and journal articles, books and blog posts as secondary data. Primary data was collected by watching the film repeatedly, focusing on the portrayal of men and masculinity. The film was segmented into three parts, focusing on their narrative significance to the story and characters. Scenes, dialogues, and overall narrative were analysed using a conceptual framework consisting of concepts from masculinity studies, the male gaze, and gender performativity. As for the secondary data, a critical comparison was conducted to identify the similarities, differences, and patterns that emerged.

Results: First, men are portrayed as insignificant beings without meaning inside the matriarchal Barbie world. Their journey to the real world reveals that men and masculinity have separate genesis as Ken adopts toxic masculine traits by performing according to his desired gender. The end brings the realisation that through gender performativity, men only add pressure on themselves, portraying men as victims of patriarchy rather than intentional oppressors. The film concludes, establishing Ken as the "New Man" in a post-feminist era, one who is capable of pursuing his own meaning.

Conclusion: Portraying the men in a matriarchal society as insignificant with no inherent meaning, the film holds a mirror back to the real-world women who are living in a patriarchal society and universalises the oppression in any gender based authoritarian system. Barbie explores a novel approach to understanding and guiding the discourse on men in the post-feminist reality.

Keywords: Gender studies, Masculinity studies, Feminist film