

Representation of Gender Equality in the “Barbie” Film: Semiotic Analysis of Roland Barthes

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Received: February 2024; Accepted: April 2024; Published: June 2024

Abstract

This research focuses on the representation of gender equality in the live-action film "Barbie" produced by Warner Bros. which was released in 2023 and directed by Greta Gerwig. This film illustrates how the characters Barbie and Ken face differences in the social construction of gender between the utopian world they live in and the real world. Gender equality itself is the assumption that men and women have the same position. Through nurture theory, we can assume that gender is a characteristic inherent in men and women through social construction, not due to biological factors. This research uses qualitative methods by collecting data through documentary, observational, and literature methods. The data was then analyzed using Roland Barthes' semiotics. In this film, we see how female characters have positions of power in government against stereotypes, dare to defend themselves when they are ridiculed as a form of resistance to objectification, women who then dare to express their opinions against marginalization, and male characters who dare to be vulnerable in their actions. express their feelings so that there is no more emotional suppression. These four phenomena are indicators that serve as an assessment of the analysis of gender equality in this research. Thus, through the film "Barbie" it is known that there are four research units that represent stereotypes, objectification, marginalization, and emotional oppression.

Keywords: Film; Gender Equality; Nurture Theory; Roland Barthes; Semiotics.

Abstrak

Penelitian ini berfokus pada representasi kesetaraan gender dalam film aksi langsung "Barbie" yang diproduksi oleh Warner Bros. yang dirilis pada tahun 2023 dan disutradarai oleh Greta Gerwig. Film ini memberikan ilustrasi tentang bagaimana dua karakter utama bernama Barbie dan Ken menghadapi perbedaan dalam konstruksi sosial gender antara dunia utopia tempat mereka tinggal, disebut juga dengan "Barbieland", dan dunia nyata. Kesetaraan gender sendiri adalah asumsi bahwa pria dan wanita memiliki posisi yang sama. Melalui pandangan teori nurture, kita dapat mengasumsikan bahwa gender merupakan karakteristik yang melekat pada pria dan wanita melalui konstruksi sosial, bukan karena faktor biologis. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan pengumpulan data melalui metode dokumenter, observasi dan literatur. Data kemudian dianalisis menggunakan semiotika Roland Barthes. Dalam film ini, kita melihat bagaimana karakter perempuan memiliki posisi kekuasaan dalam pemerintahan melawan stereotip, berani membela diri ketika mereka mendapat ejekan sebagai bentuk perlawanan terhadap objektifikasi, perempuan yang kemudian berani menyatakan pendapat mereka melawan marginalisasi, dan karakter laki-laki yang berani menjadi rentan dalam menyatakan perasaan mereka sehingga tidak ada lagi penindasan emosional. Keempat fenomena tersebut merupakan indikator yang menjadi penilaian atas analisis kesetaraan gender dalam penelitian ini. Dengan demikian, melalui film "Barbie" diketahui bahwa ada empat unit penelitian yang mewakili stereotip, objektifikasi, marginalisasi, dan penindasan emosional.

Kata Kunci: Film; Kesetaraan Gender; Teori Nature; Roland Barthes; Semiotika.

doi: [10.51544/jlmc.v8i1.4952](https://doi.org/10.51544/jlmc.v8i1.4952)

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INTRODUCTION

Film as a form of mass media can depict and convey messages to society in the form of images and dialogue (Malisi et al. 2023). Not only is it a medium for entertainment and expressing culture, but film also provides important images and life lessons to its target audience (Suwanto, Setiawan, and Adikara 2021). More than just entertainment, film has become a medium that is able to influence and shape public values and opinions through role-playing and stories told with artistic expression. With its ability to convey diverse messages, films have their power and role in shaping cultural perspectives in society. This reflects contemporary communication styles in the cultural realm (Garczewska 2019).

Through films, we can see what is being represented in the story. Representation itself includes conveying ideas, emotions, facts, and stories through various media such as images, dialogue, or sequences from each scene (Pranaya and Wijaksono 2023). This representation functions as non-verbal communication which provides an overview of human thinking and the relationship between the meaning of each object or event depicted, whether real or fictional. This is due to how useful is a representation for conveying messages from communicator to communicant. If we look at the Big Indonesian Dictionary, representation is defined as an action that represents two situations by highlighting the relationship between symbols and meaning. With this, we know that representation is implicit in nature which allows for different interpretations when accepted by each individual as a development of meaning.

The notable film "Barbie," which was co-directed by Greta Gerwig and Noah Baumbach, is produced by Warner Bros. The star-studded cast includes well-known performers including America Ferrera, Ryan Gosling, Simu Lu, Margot Robbie, and Dua Lipa. This picture attracted a lot of attention upon its initial release on July 20, 2023, and it was exhibited in 15,700 cinemas across 51 countries. The film brought in IDR 473.5 billion in income in the same month, which was indicative of its outstanding box office success (Alviyanti and Siraj 2023).

Building on this achievement, "Barbie" has been nominated a remarkable 48 times in 2024, indicating both industry acceptance and positive reviews. Recently, the movie won two coveted Golden Globes: Best Motion Picture and Best Box Office Achievement. Barbie's standing as a noteworthy contribution to contemporary film in terms of both artistic merit and commercial success is reinforced by this recognition.

In this Barbie world full of hope, barbies and other women live their lives peacefully and carry out their respective roles. Until one day, Barbie experienced an identity crisis that made her start thinking about death, something that certainly shouldn't be a worry in the Barbie world. After much discussion, Barbie finally decides to go exploring the "real world" with Ken to fix her identity crisis. It is in the real world that Barbie and Ken discover gender roles that are completely inversely proportional to what they have experienced so far in the Barbie world. This research will discuss gender dynamics and their impact on the understanding of the two main characters, Barbie and Ken. We will see how they will question each other's gender perceptions that have been understood with implications that are relevant to today's world.

Gender alludes to the contrasts between men and women in terms of values and behaviors, including a set of social properties and behaviors existing inside each sexual orientation (Stark et al. 2020). Society commonly translates gender as a refinement between the genders, however comes up short of recognizing its social development concerning parts, capacities, and social obligations, driving societal holes and separation against both genders (Rippon 2023). In spite of being a typical angle of social marvels, gender contrasts frequently result in bad form, especially disadvantaging women due to winning societal standards that depict men as predominant, forming sex incongruities in social status and parts (Ma'unah 2021). These contrasts in parts, strengthened by societal standards and social translations, sustain imbalances, especially within the division of residential and open

obligations, with women predominantly assigned to household chores that don't surrender riches or impact, whereas men are entrusted with open duties that bestow control and assets (Murnen and Smolak 2019).

Gender equality, on the other hand, advocates for breaking even with status and openings for men and women to work out their rights and fulfill their potential in all perspectives of life. It emphasizes reasonable access to assets, opportunities, and human rights, aiming to guarantee that advancement benefits are similarly dispersed among all genders (S.M. Exposto 2023). Consequently, it is imperative to utilize numerous measurements for assessing and scrutinizing the amplex of open approaches concerning gender equality. These measurements include different features, counting eradicating generalizations, guaranteeing flexibility from gender-based savagery and objectification, advancing impartial decision-making authority, moderating marginalization and wage aberrations, as well as improving by and large well-being, and tending to enthusiastic well-being concerns (European Institute for Gender Equality., n.d.).

By analyzing the concept of nurture theory, we can understand gender as a construct that is created socially and culturally for men and women. This means that gender is not solely influenced by biological or religious factors (Hidayah 2020). This theory argues that beliefs, social norms, and expectations for both genders are factors built from culture and society. When this society interprets this view continuously, different role expectations are created between men and women (Lubis, Abidin, and Achiriah 2023). Many things in this world such as experiences, opportunities, and social interactions are influenced by these expectations. Nurture theory discusses how social and cultural contexts can shape the expectations and beliefs that are so attached to gender roles (Nila Sastrawati, n.d.).

The roles and expectations given by society will then greatly influence experiences and interactions related to gender construction (Fausto-Sterling 2019). Nurture theory highlights how, in a social and cultural context, this construction influences the norms in society regarding their perception of gender roles. (Kholish 2023). These differences in perception then give rise to inequality in various fields such as education, work, and the economy. This will then have a broad impact on social mobility and overall well-being between men and women. Women themselves face discrimination which then hinders them in professional fields, their access to positions of power, and their participation in decision-making. Equally, this certainly influences the potential for collective change in society. Limiting their well-being, opportunities, and potential (Santos Silva and Klasen 2021). To address these gender inequalities, we need comprehensive, collaborative research to remove these systemic barriers and encourage a more equitable society.

To be able to see how gender equality is represented in a film, semiotic analysis is used. Semiotics itself means "sign" and is a field of science that studies and explores signs and the various processes involved in these signs. Semiotics is a branch of communication science that focuses on the function, reception, delivery, and relationship of signs with other signs (Parmentier et al. 1986). This research uses Roland Barthes' theory because of its critical perspective. Barthes expanded the concept of "sign" and existing theories and differentiated it into signifier (what is said, read, or written) and signified (the thought or concept behind it) (Urfan 2019). Barthes also introduced two significant orders, namely denotation as conveying explicit meaning and connotation as deepening emotional and cultural interpretation (Susanti and Rahmawati 2021). As a complement, this research will also discuss myths, which will further deepen how these signs contribute to cultural and societal narratives.

Through this semiological analysis, we can reveal new meanings in understanding social construction, thus encouraging us to be more critical of modern myths through cultural studies (Jadou and Ghabra 2021). Barthes' semiotics can be implemented in various mass media such as TV, radio, newspapers, films, and photos. This proves how widely Barthes's semiotic science is applied in describing and deconstructing signs in society (Zhou 2023).

RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses a qualitative descriptive approach and Roland Barthes' semiotic methodology to investigate gender representation in the live-action film "Barbie." Qualitative research involves collecting descriptive data through written or spoken terms and observable behavior. This method is very suitable for exploring phenomena that cannot be measured but can be explained using language or speech (Bilhaq 2023). So, then we will look at the representation given in the film "Barbie". It can be said that representation is one way of conveying messages from the communicator to the communicant. The main aim of this research is to examine the symbols in the film to determine whether there is a depiction of gender equality.

The paradigm used in this research is the constructivism paradigm. The constructivism paradigm is where each individual tries to explain various meanings (Begum and Vanisree 2019). The characteristic of the constructivism paradigm is to find out an event or social event which is in accordance with the aim of this research, namely to find out the representation of gender equality in the film "Barbie". The constructivism paradigm is a way to study and interpret social actions that have meaning.

In this research, the method of Roland Barthes' semiotics is used. According to Roland Barthes, language is a system of signs that describes the expectations of a particular society in a particular period of time. In Roland Barthes' semiotic approach, three things are prioritized, namely:

- a. Denotative, is the first level of meaning. Denotative produces clear and definite meaning. Denotative is the actual meaning in a large dictionary.
- b. Connotative, is the second level of meaning. Connotative produces indirect and uncertain meaning. Connotative has a different meaning than the actual meaning.
- c. Myth is a culture or thing that has existed for a long time, continues to develop, and is believed by society. Myth becomes a new sign that will develop into a denotational meaning through the connotative meaning of a sign.

In this research, researchers want to know the representation of gender equality in the film "Barbie". Researchers will use semiotic methods to analyze the signs related to the film "Barbie" to find representations of gender equality. Roland Barthes's semiotic method has three elements, namely denotation, connotation, and myth, which are expected to be able to understand in depth the values of the representation depicted.

Data collection was carried out in three stages. The first is recording or taking pictures of every film scene that represents the issue of gender equality. The second is to carry out a complete and in-depth analysis of each scene. And the last thing is to study it through predetermined theories to better understand contextually the message the filmmaker wants to convey. The entirety of the research process was carried out in Jakarta, spanning from 25th of January to 10th of February 2024.

This research draws upon four previous studies which explore the similar topic. These studies include "Representation of Gender Equality in Ngeri Ngeri Sedap Films" authored by Auliya & Wiwid in 2023, "Gender Equality Represented in The Animated Film Ralph Breaks The Internet" conducted by Satrio & Dwi in 2021, "An Analysis of Gender Equality of Chinese Culture in Mulan Film" authored by Sirikit et al in 2020, and "Analysis of Gender Equality and Feminism of Main Character in Collette Movie" undertaken by Lintang Ursita in 2019.

Researchers collect the data to be researched and divide it into 2 data sources, namely primary and secondary:


1. Primary Data is data that is directly obtained from the research object. The primary data in this research is the film "Barbie". Researchers will observe every scene in the film "Barbie".
2. Secondary data is data that is used as support to complement primary data. Secondary data in this research are books and journals that researchers use as references in this research.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In the “Barbie” film, the presence of gender equality signs is depicted through stereotyping, marginalizing, objectifying, and emotional suppression.

Representation of Gender Equality Unit Analysis 1

Table 1
Representation of Stereotyping as in Gender Equality

Scene	Denotation	Connotation	Myth
 <p>Image 1. Barbie in the parliament position Source: Barbie Film, 2023</p>	<p>It's shown that the president of Barbie Land is a woman. Not to mention, the ministers, press reporters, and judges on the bench were all played by women. One of them in court said "I have no difficulty holding both logic and feeling at the same time. And it does not diminish my powers, but expands them."</p>	<p>They called for a campaign of love and compassion for each other. They are happy to live their lives in government and politics while keeping their feminine nature at heart. They have no difficulty expressing their feelings both logically and emotionally.</p>	<p>The world of governance, politics and law is often perceived as a patriarchal world. Where women find it difficult to get "proper" positions.</p>

In the first unit of analysis, we will discuss gender stereotypes. This scene explains society's expectations for men and women. Stereotyping is simply defined as the behavior of compartmentalizing gender roles. This behavior is a phenomenon that has been deeply embedded and developed in communities from various cultural backgrounds. One of the biggest factors in this view is the impact of parental parenting and the surrounding environment which then shapes our perceptions from an early age (Hentschel, Heilman, and Peus 2019). Women who are continually taught this view are often directed to seek work that is closely related to caring. These jobs include nurse, teacher, assistant, make-up artist, and others. In terms of patterns, we can see how these jobs require emotional intelligence. The opposite happens to men. As men, we are taught to be strong, brave, and mighty. The professions that should be taken are doctor, astronaut, president, and police. This phenomenon ultimately creates difficulties for both genders to have opportunities in professional fields that are at odds with their gender roles. Not only that, in terms of career opportunities, women have difficulty getting higher positions, which has an impact on their welfare (Pace and Sciotto 2021).

The film "Barbie" challenges this stereotype by providing images of women in various high and powerful positions in the state such as president, parliament, or even top prosecutors. Not only that, it also depicts many women who work as construction workers. and astronauts, as we know, need a strong physique. Through interviews with Thallyana Tantry, a gender equality advocate in the "Perempuan Berkisah" community, she also agreed that there should be no restrictions on women in any sphere. Whether at work or other domestic stigmas that only target women. According to researchers, this scene has very interesting details in depicting what would happen if women were in parliament. It can be seen from the decoration of the room which is all pink, wearing dresses during meetings, and the atmosphere of mutual support created by the filmmakers which really illustrates that women are able to carry out their duties as parliament even though they do not lose elements of their feminine nature.

Representation of Gender Equality Unit Analysis 2

Table 2
Representation of Objectifying as in Gender Equality

Scene	Denotation	Connotation	Myth
 <p>Image 2. Barbie and Ken's first encounter to in the real world Source: Barbie Film, 2023</p>	<p>In this scene, Barbie and Ken have just arrived in the real world. But with Barbie's flashy outfit, she received a catcall from several men who work in construction. They said "If I say your body is hot, will you do it to me?" and "I can see myself in your shorts". It didn't stop there, Barbie decided to defend herself by saying that she and Ken don't have genitals.</p>	<p>Barbie was verbally sexually harassed. Men flirted with Barbie's body in her tight clothes as if women were only seen as objects. With the dialog, it appears that they even imagine themselves "using" Barbie's body. This immediately makes Barbie uncomfortable and she realizes that the men's words have a double meaning. So, she quickly answers that she and Ken do not have genitals. She wants to make them realize that it is useless to objectify their body.</p>	<p>Women can be judged by their appearance. Through the clothes she wears, the size of her breasts or butt, the color of her hair, or the shape of her body. This is often associated with matters of a sexual nature.</p>

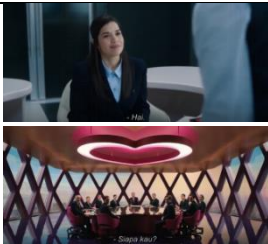
Through the second unit of analysis, researchers studied objectification behavior in women. This behavior certainly dehumanizes women as creatures who also have rights over themselves. Gender objectification is understood as behavior or assumptions where gender does not have feelings, autonomy, or experience of itself. Gender that is a victim of objectification is only seen as a tool (Dvir et al. 2021). This opinion is based on nurture which assumes that the phenomenon that occurs is a cultural aspect that has occurred from generation to generation. This view has become an ingrained tradition until it finally becomes normal in society. Cultural norms often impose limitations on women

which then hinder their efforts to live more independent lives. Women are expected to play domestic roles for their families (Giuliano 2020). Women should be at home cooking for their husbands, supporting their husbands, taking care of the children, helping their parents, and so on. This view then not only reduces women's ambitions but also harms women's psychology with the perception of lower self-esteem (Sáez, Valor-Segura, and Expósito 2019). Women are often required to constantly pay attention to their appearance to avoid sexual harassment. In fact, in many cases, it is proven that no matter how a woman looks, sexual harassment will still occur from irresponsible individuals.

Barbie's scene this time depicts how she defends her rights when she experiences sexual harassment in the real world. Even though Barbie was ultimately taken to the police station as a consequence of self-defense, Barbie remained firm in defending her autonomy and challenging inappropriate behavior. In this analysis, Thallyana further emphasized the necessity of acknowledging catcalling as a form of sexual harassment across all societal strata. In instances of verbal harassment, victims reacting assertively in self-defense should not be unfairly labeled as disruptive or attention-seeking. The focus should not be on controlling the victim's response but on addressing the normalization of verbal harassment. This scene can give all women the courage to speak up and defend their right to feel safe when harassed, especially in public places. Barbie provides a good how she was not afraid at all to the authority regarding her action.

Representation of Gender Equality Unit Analysis 3

Table 3
Representation of Marginalization as in Gender Equality


Scene	Denotation	Connotation	Myth
 <p>Image 3. Gloria working as a secretary in Mattel office Source: Barbie Film, 2023</p>	<p>Gloria's character is seen sitting at her desk as a secretary at the Mattel company. Gloria spent her time drawing while waiting for the higher-ups to gather big ideas. The scene changes to show the higher-ups who turn out to be all men. But in the end, Gloria had the courage to propose her idea to the higher-ups to create an ordinary Barbie. Just ordinary.</p>	<p>This scene illustrates that women usually do not have positions of power in companies. She had many ideas—seen from the drawings she made—but did not have the opportunity or access to express them to higher-ups. At the end of the film, when the higher-ups finally accepted Gloria's idea, that was the point where the higher-ups began to appreciate Gloria for having equal access to express her ideas and input.</p>	<p>Women are a gender that is considered more emotional. Therefore, it is believed that decision making by men is better than by women. They look at women's wellbeing as if women are incapable of being in positions of power.</p>

Turning to the third unit of analysis, this time the researcher will focus on the phenomenon of marginalization. Marginalization is a behavior that frequently appears in the workplace and has a major impact on the opportunities and influence of certain genders (Dorrance Hall and Gettings 2020). In cases that often occur today, men are often considered more appropriate and competent to occupy higher positions and receive greater benefits. This certainly shows gender disparities in assessing job qualifications (Olarewaju and Fernando 2020). When choosing a job promotion, a superior tends to consider gender characteristics apart from professional skills as competency values. Society assumes that men have more logical decision-making abilities, so they are more deserving of being in higher positions. This is of course very detrimental to women. In addition, the assumption that women are secondary breadwinners is a secondary consideration in selecting positions (Barnnen 2019).

In the film "Barbie", the character Gloria, who is faced with this phenomenon, experiences frustration because her ideas are never heard by the directors. But then at the end of the film, with her courage, she gives her ideas to the directors and explains why her ideas need to be considered. Ideas This is then accepted and this scene provides a complete picture of an example of gender marginalization. In this case, Thallyana emphasized that no social creature should be relegated to the status of second place. Men and women deserve equal standing in society. This sentiment is underscored by the prevalent societal stigma, which often labels women who pursue their careers as overly ambitious. This scene might initially seem unfamiliar, as in our everyday lives, we may not readily discern that the prevailing ideas or authority within companies often stem from men. Nevertheless, with the passage of time, particularly observing the burgeoning beauty industry worldwide, a noticeable shift is occurring, with an increasing number of women assuming directorial roles.

Representation of Gender Equality Unit Analysis 4

Table 4
Representation of Emotional Suppression as in Gender Equality

Scene	Denotation	Connotation	Myth
 <p>Image 4. Ken is expressing his true feelings to Barbie Source: Barbie Film, 2023</p>	<p>Ken rested his head. He said that Barbie never considered him and he was tired of it. He experienced culture shock before finally breaking down and feeling exhausted by the impact of what he had done to Barbie Land. He was sobbing and being very vulnerable to Barbie.</p>	<p>We see Ken's awareness of patriarchal culture in the real world which he then brings to Barbie Land. However, the plan did not go smoothly. Ken, who has never expressed his vulnerability and anxiety, now has the courage to express it. In this scene, Ken looks emotional and even cries about it. Although he was embarrassed at first to be seen crying in front of Barbie.</p>	<p>It is believed that men should not cry; because men are the more logical gender. Men are usually not given a comfortable space to express their worries, sadness, and vulnerability.</p>

In the last unit of analysis, we will examine the representation of emotional oppression which generally occurs in men. This proves how social construction has a very bad impact on men's emotional expression (Berke et al. 2020). Perceptions from society continue to instill that men should be more logical and not get caught up in feelings. This creates new problems where men end up having difficulty articulating their feelings. The ideology of our parents, since we were little, reinforces the notion that men should not cry, and should not be too emotionally vulnerable. As we know, feelings are something we cannot avoid, so this teaching causes men to suppress their feelings (Gross and Cassidy 2019). This emotional suppression can have a very far-reaching impact and we can prove it through increased rates of depression and suicide in men who feel isolated about their own feelings (Olliffe et al. 2019).

Different from what the masses have grown up with, the film "Barbie" shows the character Ken, as a masculine and strong character, experiencing emotional moments. In this scene, Ken opens up and pours out all the feelings he has been holding back while crying in front of Barbie. And that's where Barbie responded by listening to Ken's complaints and validating that whatever Ken felt was right. They are then willing to help each other in finding their respective identities. Thallyana highlights the importance of universal understanding regarding this behavior. Regrettably, entrenched stigmas persist, dictating that men should maintain stoic masculinity, refraining from tears, while women, expected to embody femininity, are pressured to conform to obedience. But within modern relationships, we're witnessing a shift where the acceptance of men expressing their emotions through tears is becoming increasingly normalized. This acknowledgment reflects a fundamental understanding that, as human beings, we all experience a spectrum of emotions—joy, sorrow, anger, and more—making such displays not only possible but also permissible.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The conclusion is, the film "Barbie" is an interesting example of a film that provides representation for gender equality. It's no wonder why this film ended up getting so many international nominations within a year of its release. This film helps us see the horror of the negative impacts of gender discrimination. This message is conveyed through scenes about gender stereotypes, gender objectification, gender marginalization, and emotional oppression. This film gives a positive message to the audience to always understand and fight for the right to gender equality for everyone around us, including ourselves. For further research, you can focus more on other films that provide more contemporary relevance. Hopefully Hollywood can produce more films like "Barbie" that not only entertain but also provide lessons for young audiences.

I hope that the wider community who reads this journal will gain new insight into critical thinking in watching films. So that we are not only entertained but we also get the essence of learning from every film we watch.

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