
CHALLENGING THE GENDER ROLES STEREOTYPE'S

IN BARBIE THE MOVIE 2023

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini menganalisis Barbie the Movie 2023 dengan menggunakan teori feminisme liberal Betty Friedan dalam The Feminine Mystique. Studi ini berfokus pada representasi dan tantangan terhadap stereotip peran gender serta bentuk resistensi terhadap ekspektasi sosial dalam film. Dengan metode kualitatif deskriptif, penelitian ini menemukan dua aspek utama: (1) representasi stereotip gender yang mencakup karakter Barbie dan Ken, serta (2) bentuk resistensi terhadap norma gender, yang ditunjukkan melalui krisis eksistensial Barbie dan transformasi karakter Ken. Hasil analisis menunjukkan bahwa film ini tidak hanya mengkritik peran gender tradisional tetapi juga menegaskan kebebasan individu dan kesetaraan gender. Dengan pendekatan feminisme liberal, studi ini menyoroti peran media dalam menantang konstruksi sosial gender di era modern.

Kata kunci : *Barbie The Movie 2023, Feminisme Liberal, Stereotip Gender*

Abstract

This study analyzes Barbie the Movie 2023 using Betty Friedan's liberal feminism theory from The Feminine Mystique. It focuses on the representation and challenges to gender role stereotypes, as well as forms of resistance against societal expectations in the film. Using a descriptive qualitative method, the study identifies two main aspects: (1) the representation of gender stereotypes, including the characters Barbie and Ken, and (2) forms of resistance against gender norms, reflected in Barbie's existential crisis and Ken's character transformation. The findings indicate that the film not only critiques traditional gender roles but also emphasizes individual freedom and gender equality. Through a liberal feminist approach, this study highlights the role of media in challenging social constructions of gender in the modern era.

Keywords : *Barbie The Movie 2023, Liberal Feminism, Gender Stereotypes*

INTRODUCTION

Literature has long served as a powerful medium for reflecting societal conditions and human experiences. Wellek (2016, p. 3) defines literature as a creative and artistic expression that conveys human thoughts and emotions through language. In contemporary times, film has emerged as an extension of literary expression, effectively capturing social, political, and cultural themes (Pratista, 2017). As both a reflection and influencer of popular culture, film plays a crucial role in shaping societal ideologies, particularly concerning gender representation and stereotypes.

American cinema has historically engaged with gender discourse, evolving alongside feminist movements that challenge traditional gender roles. Hooks (in Sari et al., 2023) highlights how feminist thought seeks to dismantle gender-based oppression and advocate for equality. Films serve as platforms for these discussions, offering narratives that critique systemic inequalities and inspire change. One recent example is *Barbie the Movie 2023*, directed by Greta Gerwig, which critically examines gender dynamics through fantasy and satire. The film juxtaposes a female-led utopian Barbie Land with a patriarchal real world, presenting a nuanced exploration of societal gender expectations.

This study employs Betty Friedan's liberal feminist theory, particularly her concept of "the feminine mystique," to analyze *Barbie the Movie 2023* as a critique of gender role stereotypes. Friedan (1963) argues that societal expectations confine women to domestic roles, limiting their potential for self-actualization. The film aligns with these ideas, depicting Barbie's resistance to restrictive gender norms and advocating for self-determination. By applying Friedan's framework, this study explores how contemporary cinema challenges entrenched gender stereotypes, promotes female empowerment, and fosters a more inclusive society.

1. Gender Stereotypes

Gender stereotypes are socially constructed perceptions and expectations about men and women based on cultural norms. Ann Oakley (1972) defines gender as a cultural classification that shapes roles, tasks, and attributes assigned to individuals. Unlike sex, which is biologically determined, gender is influenced by societal expectations (Kendall, 1998). These stereotypes create rigid norms that dictate behavior and responsibilities, reinforcing traditional gender roles and affecting personal identity and social interactions

(Niumai, 2012). Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) critiques gender stereotypes that confine women to domestic roles, arguing that societal pressures limit their ambitions and opportunities. Despite progress, these stereotypes persist, restricting women's representation in leadership and decision-making roles, underscoring the ongoing struggle for gender equality.

2. Feminism

Feminism is both a theoretical perspective and a political movement aimed at eliminating gender-based oppression. It advocates for women's rights in various domains, including education, employment, political representation, and bodily autonomy (Fan, 2017). Feminism seeks to dismantle sexist structures and promote gender equality by challenging discriminatory practices and advocating for systemic reforms. The feminist movement has evolved in distinct waves, each addressing different issues. The first wave (19th-early 20th century) focused on women's suffrage. The second wave (1960s-1980s) expanded its scope to workplace rights, domestic violence, and reproductive rights. The third wave (1990s-2010s) emphasized intersectionality, recognizing the diverse experiences of women across race, class, and sexuality (Hundleby, 2012). The ongoing fourth wave, emerging in the digital era, utilizes social media activism to combat sexism and gender-based violence (Cochrane, 2013).

3. Liberal Feminism

Liberal feminism advocates for individual freedom and equal rights by focusing on legal and policy reforms to dismantle structural barriers that limit women's participation in public life (Kaur & Nagaich, 2019). Rooted in Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), which argued for women's access to education, the movement evolved through John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor Mill's advocacy for women's political and economic rights in the 19th century. In the 20th century, Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) revitalized liberal feminism by critiquing the societal expectation that women find fulfillment solely in domestic roles. She identified "the problem that has no name," describing the dissatisfaction many women felt due to restrictive gender roles. Friedan's work laid the foundation for second-wave feminism, emphasizing women's rights to higher education, professional careers, and legal equality. Her ideas continue to shape contemporary feminist discourse on gender roles and societal expectations.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a descriptive qualitative research approach to examine gender roles and resistance in *Barbie the Movie 2023*. As Creswell (2014) states, this approach is appropriate for analyzing social issues in their natural contexts. Data collection involved multiple viewings of the film and a review of relevant literature, including scholarly articles and film critiques, to identify key scenes, dialogues, and character interactions that reflect gender norms and resistance. The study utilizes Miles and Huberman's qualitative data analysis model (as cited in Sugiyono, 2017), which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data was categorized based on relevance, presented descriptively with direct quotations, and analyzed to explore how the film challenges and redefines societal gender expectations. Furthermore, the research applies Betty Friedan's liberal feminist perspective from *The Feminine Mystique* to assess the representation of women's roles and resistance to societal norms. This methodological framework enables an in-depth analysis of how *Barbie the Movie 2023* contributes to discussions on gender stereotypes, resistance, and feminist thought.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Representation and Resistance: Analyzing Gender Role Stereotypes in *Barbie the Movie 2023* through the Lens of Liberal Feminism

1. Barbie and other Barbies

Datum 1



Picture 1 Scene 00:03:50 – 00:08:00

The opening scene of *Barbie the Movie 2023* presents Barbie Land as a utopia, this aligns with Betty Friedan's critique in *The Feminine Mystique*, which highlights the unrealistic expectations imposed on women. Despite its seemingly progressive structure where women hold leadership roles while men remain secondary Barbie Land mirrors patriarchal constraints by emphasizing external perfection. Barbie's existential crisis disrupts this illusion, reflecting Friedan's concept of "the problem that has no name," where women feel unfulfilled despite societal notions of success. This moment marks a turning point, challenging gender norms and initiating Barbie's journey toward self-discovery and

autonomy. Thus, the scene not only highlights gender stereotypes but also introduces resistance against patriarchal expectations.

B. Barbie and Barbies' Resistance

Datum 2



Picture 2 Scene 00:16:00 – 00:18:09

In this scene, the lens of Betty Friedan's liberal feminism, particularly the problem that has no name from *The Feminine Mystique*, Barbie's transformation signifies resistance against societal expectations of feminine perfection. In *Barbieland*, she embodies the ideal woman flawless and perpetually happy. However, her physical and emotional discomfort symbolizes the deeper conflict between personal identity and restrictive gender norms. This realization challenges the illusion of perfection she once upheld, mirroring the awakening of women in *The Feminine Mystique*, who questioned traditional gender roles. This moment marks the beginning of her liberation, aligning with liberal feminism's emphasis on individual freedom in defining one's identity beyond societal constraints.

Datum 3



Picture 3 Scene 01:23:10 - 01:25:14

This scene, gender dynamics in this moment illustrate resistance to social expectations. Rather than passively accepting traditional roles, Barbie strategically pretends to enjoy the Kens' attention, using their self-absorption to her advantage. This aligns with Betty Friedan's liberal feminist theory, which advocates for women's autonomy beyond domestic roles. By outwardly conforming, Barbie subtly challenges patriarchal norms, manipulating power dynamics in her favor. Resistance in this scene is expressed through performative acts, where both Barbies and Kens adopt expected roles but with opposing intentions. Barbie subverts expectations by outmaneuvering the Kens, turning their uncertainty into a tool of resistance. Through Friedan's lens, this moment exemplifies how Barbie disrupts gender norms, appearing compliant while asserting autonomy and challenging traditional power structures.

Datum 4

Picture 4 Scene 00:40:14 - 00:41:12

Barbie's existential journey embodies resistance against societal gender expectations, aligning with Betty Friedan's liberal feminism. Barbie's self-doubt, expressed in statements like *"Maybe I'm not Barbie anymore,"* challenges *The Feminine Mystique*, which conditions women to derive fulfillment from predefined roles. This realization exposes gender identity as a social construct that restricts women's potential. Her decision to become human marks the film's most radical act of defiance, rejecting societal pressures and liberating her from the housewife syndrome criticized by Friedan. The dialogue with Ruth Handler further critiques patriarchy as a fabricated system rather than an inherent truth. Ruth's statement *"Humans make things up like patriarchy and Barbie just to deal with how uncomfortable it is"* emphasizes that both are artificial constructs designed to shape women's identities. Barbie's recognition of her idealized nature allows her to break free from gender role constraints, reinforcing liberal feminism's advocacy for autonomy. Ultimately, Barbie's journey transcends self-discovery; it is an active form of resistance against restrictive gender norms. By choosing her own path, she embodies Friedan's argument that women have the right to define their identities and life trajectories..

2. Ken and other Kens**Datum 5**

Picture 5 Scene 00:08:47 – 00:09:20

Ken's beach scene in *Barbie the Movie 2023* illustrates the influence of gender role constructions on identity and happiness, aligning with Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*. The scene's visual contrasts warm colors representing Barbie's ideal world and cool tones subtly emphasizing Ken's vulnerability highlight his dependence on Barbie's validation. Bright lighting further exposes his performative struggle for recognition, reinforcing the pressures of traditional masculinity. The narration, *"Ken only has a good*

day if Barbie looks at him,” underscores his reliance on external approval, reflecting Friedan’s critique of restrictive social roles. While the film critiques female gender expectations, it also reveals how masculinity imposes rigid demands of strength and competition, limiting self-actualization. *Barbie* 2023 broadens the discourse on gender equality, demonstrating that both men and women suffer under societal constraints. Echoing Friedan’s ideas, the film advocates for self-definition beyond imposed identities as a path to true liberation.

Datum 6



Picture 6 Scene 01:29:00 - 01:31:00

The dream ballet scene in *Barbie the Movie* 2023 visually illustrates the Kens' frustration with socially constructed masculinity. Through expressive choreography, shifting rhythms, and fluid movements, the scene conveys their struggle against restrictive gender expectations. Instead of embodying dominance and strength, the Kens display vulnerability, challenging the rigid and emotionless ideal of masculinity. Their bodies become a medium of resistance, countering hegemonic norms that demand emotional suppression. The scene also critiques the patriarchal system by revealing how masculinity rooted in control and dominance can be burdensome for men. The use of dynamic music and vibrant, flowing costumes reinforces this resistance, breaking away from conventional masculine imagery. Rather than direct confrontation, the scene employs art to promote a more inclusive and liberated vision of masculinity.

Datum 7



Picture 7 Scene 01:32:20 - 01:33:57

Ken’s emotional shift illustrates Ken’s struggle with patriarchal masculinity once proud of his constructed identity, he begins to see the emptiness of rigid gender roles. His eventual breakdown symbolizes resistance to male dominance and emotional suppression, with his tears rejecting the notion that masculinity must be rooted in superiority. This analysis aligns with Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique*, which critiques the illusion of

fulfillment in restrictive gender roles. While Friedan focused on women's confinement in domesticity, Ken's struggle reverses this dynamic he is trapped in a role demanding dominance and suppression of emotions. His realization challenges the expectation that men must define themselves through superiority. The dialogue at 01:36:49 - 01:36:52, "*We're only fighting because we didn't know who we are,*" marks a turning point, emphasizing that their conflict stems not from natural competition but from societal expectations. This moment reinforces Friedan's argument that true freedom comes from breaking free of rigid social roles. Ultimately, the scene redefines masculinity, offering an alternative to traditional gender norms.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

A. Conclusion

Barbie the Movie 2023 critically examines gender roles, stereotypes, and resistance through the lens of liberal feminism, particularly Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*. The film illustrates how societal structures confine women to restrictive roles, limiting their self-actualization. Through the analysis of key scenes and dialogues, this study identifies both the reinforcement and subversion of gender stereotypes. The findings reveal that traditional representations of masculinity and femininity are challenged through character development and narrative shifts. Barbie's existential crisis and Ken's transformation highlight different forms of resistance against societal expectations. Ultimately, the film presents a redefinition of gender norms, advocating for a more inclusive and self-aware identity through self-reflection, collaboration, and resistance.

B. Suggestion

This study recommends that future researchers delve deeper into gender roles in popular media, particularly *Barbie the Movie 2023*, using gender theory references, with an emphasis on Betty Friedan's liberal feminist framework in *The Feminine Mystique*. Beyond analyzing gender representation, researchers should explore how the film reflects or challenges cultural and social gender norms and critiques traditional female roles as discussed by Friedan. Additionally, for readers and audiences, understanding the influence of popular media on gender perceptions is crucial. This awareness fosters critical interpretation of film messages and promotes broader discussions on gender equality and inclusive representation in media.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dyah Bhakti Rahayu is an English Literature student at Universitas Bangka Belitung. She was born in Pangkalpinang on May 9, 2002. Her passion for literature, particularly in exploring various forms of media and literary works, has driven her to delve deeper into the field. She believes that literature offers a rich platform for analysis through diverse theoretical perspectives, broadening her understanding of contemporary issues in an increasingly modern world.

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