

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Looking at how the world treats gender difference today, it can be hard to imagine that around a century ago, women did not have the right to do numerous things that men were otherwise allowed to do. This disparity of treatment between genders was what ultimately sparked a movement that would be referred to as feminism. Strives towards gender equality under the banner of feminism are separated into four major waves. The First Wave began during the 19th and early 20th centuries, which sought and succeeded to provide voting rights and other various opportunities concerning legal rights for women (Tong, 2018). The Second Wave, beginning from the 1960s to the 1990s, focused on giving women equal level of education and employment opportunities, as well as introducing maternity leave, birth control, and right for abortion while also fighting against various domestic violence issues (Lear, 1968). The Third Wave, unlike the first two, served to present a critique to previous feminist trends. It lasted from the 1990s to the 2010s. Women were becoming strong, and sexism and patriarchy were being suppressed (Evans, 2015). The Fourth Wave started around 2012 and is still ongoing until the time of writing. The fourth, and current, wave seeks to further advocate women's rights and gender equality through various widely-used modern day social media such as X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and other platforms (Mohajan, 2022).

One topic that remained untouched by feminism until The Second Wave was the field of literature. Before The Second Wave, literary works produced by women were under discrimination, especially through the eyes of critics done by men. Women's writings were often considered incomprehensible or unimportant according to male standards and symbols (Tuttle, 1986). Dubbed the feminist criticism in the wake of The Second Wave, Tuttle (1986) in her book entitled *Encyclopedia of Feminism* stated that, "Feminist criticism originated as an investigation into and exposé of the sexual stereotyping of women." She further stated that the goals of feminist literary criticism are to develop a female tradition of writing, as well as to examine and appreciate works done by both men and women through a more equal and objective lens. Needless to say, those goals are more or less achieved, with many of today's widely-popular stories written by women. Some titles include *Harry Potter* (J. K. Rowling), *Hunger Games* (Suzanne Collins), and *Fullmetal Alchemist* (Hiromu Arakawa).

However, as feminism becomes a more recognised movement, there have recently been several groups of people who go beyond feminism's original goals. A study on modern-day feminism was conducted by Garridy Brown Hamilton in 2022. In his research, Hamilton mentioned a degradation in America's societal wellbeing. He surmised that a contributor to it was the acts of modern-day feminism. He pointed out behaviors that negatively impact feminism that has shown up over the years after the First Wave feminism, such as feminists shaming women who take to motherhood, false generalization of men, and resentment towards men and masculinity in general. As it has been established by past well-

known figures of it, feminism exists to combat patriarchal and misogynistic men behaviour. True to Hamilton's research, some people have retaliated harshly by instead promoting that women should be treated as more important than men, or men, less important than women. Worse still, these people refer themselves as feminists, even though the aim of feminism is to achieve a long-lasting gender equality, not to put women as a dominating gender on top of men, much like the pre-feminism society putting men on top of women. Inevitably, this has caused some people of neutral opposition to have a negative view on feminism, and may even discriminate against feminists, regardless whether they are overstepping its original goal or not. Some feminists, in response, have developed worry and reservations over identifying themselves as one in fear of being under attack by people unbeknownst to the divide inside feminism. Needless to say, promoting women as a dominating gender and belittling men brings little but harm to the feminist movement, and should not be regarded as part of feminism.

Recently, Greta Gerwig wrote and directed a live action movie entitled *Barbie* based on the popular fashion doll of the same name. The Barbie doll was invented by Ruth Handler, later co-founding the Mattel toy company which manufactured and debuted the doll in 1959 (Cox, 1977). Since its premiere at 19th July, 2023, it has grossed \$1.44 billion, making it the highest-grossing film of 2023, the highest-grossing film by a solo female director, and the 14th highest-grossing film of all time (Box Office Mojo, 2023). While the movie is rated for age 13 upwards, many people, the researcher included, claim that the movie contains numerous depictions of the aforementioned acts that overstep feminism, to a point of being

referred to as propaganda of women gender domination under the banner of feminism. Watching the movie and taking most of the things shown at face value might cause negatively twisted assumptions of feminism and overall gender difference to appear, especially for individuals who are unaware of the divide that feminism is currently facing.

Based on the background information provided above, this research aims to deconstruct the feminism depicted in the live action movie *Barbie*, and attempt to closely examine and assess the many portrayals of it contained in the movie.

1.2 Limitation of the Problem

The researcher is aware of and takes into account the limitations that this research has, as there are a couple of them. The data that will be analyzed in this research come from the 2023 live action movie entitled *Barbie*. Furthermore, other than attempting to promote feminism, the movie depicts a couple of other facets of life, such as a popular topic of identity crisis, and a mending of a mother-daughter relationship. As such, this research will only analyze scenes and lines that contain depictions of feminism, or an attempt of it. Other scenes that do not are to fall outside of this research's limitation, thus excluded from being valid data.

1.3 Research Question

The main focus of this research is a deconstruction of feminism depicted in the *Barbie* live action movie. The researcher thus proposes these questions to be attempted to answer:

1. What does the 2023 live action movie *Barbie* present as its binary hierarchy?
2. How can the binary hierarchy of the 2023 live action movie *Barbie* be overturned?

1.4 Objective of the Research

Based on the research questions posed above, this research will attempt to fulfil the following objectives:

1. To highlight the binary hierarchy that is present in the 2023 live action movie *Barbie*.
2. To overturn the binary hierarchy that is present in the 2023 live action movie *Barbie*.

