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CHALLENGING MALE ENTITLEMENT AND PATRIARCHY: *PROMISING YOUNG WOMAN*, *BARBIE*, AND CONTEMPORARY FEMINIST THEORY

ROBERT MANNING

Quincy University

DANA CRĂCIUN

West University of Timișoara

Abstract: *This paper examines comparatively the potential feminist work done by two recent films, Promising Young Woman (2020) and Barbie (2023). By employing the concepts of (male) entitlement and patriarchy, we argue that pushing the concept of patriarchy to the center of a discourse propagated by means of commercial success can have the effect of strengthening rather than undermining it. At the same time, this apparent acceptance of patriarchy as a debate topic is accompanied by continued reluctance to address entitlement.*

Keywords: *consumerism, feminist work, entitlement, masculinity, patriarchy*

1. Introduction

It seems obvious that in our era of #MeToo, with its many revelations of disgusting and often illegal male behavior, and the return and even revenge of retrograde masculinity in the figure of Trump and in Trumpism¹, feminists within the film industry in Hollywood are responding. Contemporary feminism is making powerful statements in and through film. What was once extremely rare if not entirely unheard of is now becoming commonplace: a Hollywood film not

only starring a feminist woman but directed by a feminist woman. Of these many recent films directed and starring feminist women, two are both extremely important and directly discuss and portray explicitly feminist concepts and issues: the widely acclaimed 2020 feminist movie *Promising Young Woman* and the almost unbelievably popular box office smash, the feminist movie *Barbie*. The latter came out in 2023 starring Margot Robbie and directed by Greta Gerwig, while *Promising Young Woman* was directed by Emerald Fennell and starred Carey Mulligan.

In this article, we will attempt to see these two important feminist films through the lens of some important texts in contemporary feminist theory in order to explicate the films themselves in terms of their feminist critique. Just what feminist cultural critiques do these films accomplish? What feminist concepts and arguments do they employ? What do they say about how sexism and the desire to live beyond or without it affect the lives of contemporary women and men? Also, in this present moment where, in the United States at least, we talk more and more about a crisis for men, what critical arguments do these films make about men and about masculinity? Do these avowedly feminist films hold out hope for a future where women are more empowered, where feminist ideals are realized, where sexism and male domination are challenged and diminish, and where enlightened men join with feminist women to create a better and more just and equal world for everyone? Or, on the contrary, do they undermine that hope and their own work by the specific focuses they have and the audience impact they had?

In more specific terms, we will analyze the feminist critique attempted in and through these two films by employing the work of two prominent feminist social theorists and philosophers: the popular feminist writer and African-American activist bell hooks and the philosopher Kate Manne. From hooks' wide ranging work as a feminist activist we will draw specifically on her work on feminism as sisterhood and her 2004 hopeful book about men becoming allies in the struggle against patriarchy, titled *The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity, and Love*. We will also draw upon the more recent work of Australian-American philosopher Kate Manne, more specifically upon her 2020 book *Entitled: How Male Privilege Hurts Women*. While both movies take issue with male positioning in the contemporary world, their focus is different. *Promising Young Woman* can be seen as a painful depiction of the horrors wrought by unchecked and unquestioned male entitlement. The feminist concept most significant in the movie *Barbie* is the one clearly displayed

and discussed by several of the characters in the film: patriarchy. The different focus might explain not only the different levels of (commercial) success enjoyed by the two movies but also the extent to which they advance or undermine feminist work.

2. Entitlement and privilege

Promising Young Woman (2020) is a powerful film, openly feminist in its motivations. It clearly tries to get both men and women to come to terms with the fact that in many ways male entitlement and male privilege are not only still very much real and alive but still do a great deal of damage to the lives of women. There is no mention whatsoever in this film of the word patriarchy, but the film does put on stage and critique various forms of male entitlement. There are, therefore, many intellectual ties and a deep concordance between this film and Kate Manne's feminist work published in the same year, 2020, *Entitled: How Male Privilege Hurts Women*.

In this book, Manne aims her powerful feminist critique not so much at patriarchy as at the phenomenon of male entitlement. As a younger feminist writer herself, it seems she understands that for her generation and for the generation of her students the world has in fact changed. Men are no longer the only professors, the only doctors, lawyers, judges, successful corporate types. The word patriarchy can seem a bit old-fashioned and not entirely relevant to younger generations who have grown up with the reality that there are in America far more women in universities and colleges than there are men and that this has been true for the current generation in college for their entire lives. This does not mean, of course, that various versions of male domination and supremacy have disappeared or that they no longer hinder and harm the lives of women. In her book about male entitlement, Manne seems to be trying to speak to the younger generations and trying to get them to think about how sexism still lives in their lives and in themselves, and especially within the men, and that this sexism lives through various forms of male entitlement.

For Manne, male entitlement was rather perfectly put on display during the 2016 Senate Judiciary hearings for Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh. The very first words of the book are: "He was a picture of entitlement" (2020, p. 3). The form of entitlement he performed so well is to Manne "the entitlement of privileged men" (ibid), but this is just one form of male entitlement.

In her book, she conceptualizes male entitlement as a multifaceted phenomenon that takes many forms or types. She devotes separate chapters to different forms of male entitlement or male privilege, for e.g., a chapter on male entitlement to sex, a chapter on male entitlement to power, male entitlement to admiration, male entitlement to consent, male entitlement to knowledge, to bodily control, and other chapters on other forms of male entitlement. The real and damaging problem, Manne seems to be saying, is not so much patriarchy as these various forms of male privilege and entitlement that still spread within our own selves like a disease. If we can really understand how and why this is still so, then we can see not only that we still need feminism, but that we need a version of feminism that speaks more directly to who and where we are now in a world that looks less patriarchal but is at the same time a world where male entitlement continues to damage the lives of women frequently and in many terrible ways.

This hard truth about male entitlement is precisely what *Promising Young Woman* displays and drives home from its first minute to its last. The film opens with a scene in which Carey Mulligan's character Cassie, a beautiful young woman, is stumble down drunk in a bar with men lurking. In its very first moments, the film incites anxiety within many women and probably sexual desire within many men. The narrative meets and actuates the anxiety. There are men at the bar who notice the very drunk, attractive young woman. Of course, these are good guys who are concerned about this very drunk woman. Of course, these good guys watch out for her. Of course, one of these good guys offers to give her a ride home to make sure she is ok. Of course, the good guy gets this very drunk woman to come over to his place first. Of course, he tells her how beautiful she is and starts to kiss her and grope her. Of course, he tries to take advantage of her drunken state and pressures her into sex. Of course, in her extremely drunk state she really cannot resist much, will probably pass out anyway, so what does it really matter what she says or does in this situation? The good guy here can obviously do whatever he wants and simply considers himself quite fortunate to have stumbled upon such a promising and exciting situation.

Precisely at this point Cassie reveals to the good guy that she is not drunk at all and is really quite lucid. In her surprising lucidity, she then asks the good guy some good questions, such as what is he doing? Why did he not listen to her when she said no? Why does he feel he has the right to do what he is doing? Why does he think this is an ok thing to do? Why does he even think that

this is ok for her? Why does he think this is just a form of watching out for her, of being a good guy? Is he really a good guy? Why, in fact, does he feel entitled to sex but not only to sex, but entitled to consent, and even entitled to admiration as a good guy? Why does he feel he is entitled not only to sex with Cassie but entitled to Cassie even though, when he is asked, he does not even know her name?

This opening scene is repeated a few times through the film because this pretending to be drunk in a bar is a repeat act for Cassie at this point in her young life. This repetition, this obsessive presence, alludes increasingly intensely to a powerful absence, whose driving force shapes the unfolding of the narrative as well as the viewer's engagement with it. We soon learn that, not long before this, Cassie had been a star student in medical school. So the obvious questions that hover through the first half of the film are why is she doing this? How did she go from being that promising young woman to now working in a coffee shop during the day and pretending to be drunk woman in a bar at night?

The answer lies in the absence and the name of this absence is Nina, Cassie's best friend. Nina is the promising young woman of the title and her promise, like Nina herself, no longer exists because her promise has been destroyed. The narrative of the film relies on this interplay of text and subtext, articulation and allusion, in order to emphasize in dark ironic key the impossibility of the realization of the title. A promising young woman is an insurmountable contradiction in a context articulated as a function of male privilege. Cassie functions as a lingering mirror image of Nina. They were best friends from childhood on and were in medical school together. Nina's downfall – a party where things got out of hand and where the male participants exploited Nina's mistaken belief that she was safe – plays out against the background of the same paradigm of promising youth. However, the promising young men are guaranteed a fulfilment of their potential despite their damaging behavior.

The film narrative raises the very problematic issue of consent and its shifty meaning, as well as that of the destructive position of women as bystanders. It is not only male desire and entitlement that undo Nina; the final blow is arguably delivered by other women's acquiescence in this male privilege. While the film offers no explicit scene, the indirect pieces of information paint the picture of a party with perhaps too much drinking and carousing, which ends up with Nina's

male friends feeling entitled to take advantage of the situation and pushing it beyond where Nina was willing to go, because the male friends were entitled to sex and to consent, entitled in essence to Nina in that situation. However, when Nina tells female friends other than Cassie about what happened they don't really believe her because those guys are good guys and things happen. Worse still, when Nina goes to the Dean of Students to tell her what happened, she has to protect the image of the medical school and the reputations and the futures of the male medical students because they are very promising young men and of course, on top of that, very good guys. Male entitlement, after all, lives in women too. The power of what bell hooks called "sisterhood" – the power of women supporting women which hooks argued several decades ago should be the very essence of feminism – is not, even today, as strong a force as male entitlement in its many forms. The Dean has to protect the reputation of the medical school and, of course, the promising young futures of those very educated men.

Nina, as it turns out, cannot do what she is urged to do by the Dean and by her friends other than Cassie, namely forget it, let it go, get past it. She struggles and suffers, drops out of medical school, and eventually takes her own life. She leaves behind uncomfortable memories for those good medical school guys, her friends who didn't believe her, and the Dean. It is only for Cassie that these memories go past this threshold of "uncomfortable" and prompt action. Nina's tragedy becomes also her own.

At this point, it is worth taking another look at the subtitle of Kate Manne's book *Entitled: How Male Privilege Hurts Women*. The many forms of male entitlement hurt women in many ways, and sometimes even destroys them, taking away their promising future. That truth is driven home both by Nina's absence in the film and by what that absence does to Cassie. Nina's absence, and the continuing presence of what happened to her, as well as the fact that no one is recognizing or mourning what happened to her other than Cassie, all this is destroying Cassie's own promising future. However, who really wants to think about that, all that damage and loss? The good men from the medical school certainly do not; Nina's friends who didn't take what she said seriously certainly do not; and the Dean of Students absolutely does not. Certainly, one form of male privilege is the right to live your life not thinking about that the havoc you wreak. Calling that right, that entitlement, and other forms of male entitlement, into question is precisely what feminism

should do today. This critical thinking is the work of feminist critique, work done powerfully both by Kate Manne in her book and by the strikingly feminist film *Promising Young Woman*. Its reception, though, begs the question of why its impact was nowhere near as strong and far-reaching as *Barbie*.

3. The commodification of feminism

Barbie is also in some ways a strikingly feminist film, and certainly one that has as its very center the concept that has often been at the center of feminist theory: societal domination by men and maleness or, in one word, patriarchy. After all, how many Hollywood films actually have characters discuss patriarchy, depict and critique it and even present patriarchy's polar opposite, a society wherein women have authority and power exclusively? Has there ever been a Hollywood film that has done all this feminist work portraying and critiquing patriarchy? This polar opposite of patriarchy may come as a surprise to those who have not seen the film: *Barbieland*. The film declares from the very beginning *Barbieland's* difference from patriarchy as the all-women Supreme Court undoes *Citizens United*:

In our assessment, money is not speech, and corporations have no free speech rights to begin with. So any claim on their part to be exercising a right is just their attempt to turn our democracy into a plutocracy. This makes me emotional, and I'm expressing it. I have no difficulty holding both logic and feeling at the same time. And it does not diminish my powers. It expands them. (Gerwig & Baumbach, p.6).

This, of course, is just the beginning of how the film constantly critiques patriarchy by portraying *Barbieland* as its complete opposite. *Barbieland* has a woman president, and in fact all the people whose work requires any intelligence whatsoever are women. In *Barbieland*, not only do women do everything and have all the power, but they all love and support each other as they do all the work and have all the power. The film constantly depicts and puts on display hooks' concept of true feminism as women really and tangibly helping and supporting one another, as true sisterhood. *Barbieland* is hooks' feminism as sisterhood come alive.

The film's critique of patriarchy only intensifies, of course, when Barbie has to leave Barbieland and go to the real world. Even though as she leaves Barbieland her fellow Barbies tell her "You will see all the good we have done in the real world", the real world turns out to still be a very patriarchal one. This is illustrated in the very first scene in the real world. Barbie and Ken are walking down the street and everyone is looking at them, something Ken enjoys. Ken says the way people are looking at him has no hint of violence and Barbie says: "Mine very much has an undertone of violence" (Gerwig & Baumbach, p.30). The two come to a construction site, a place where Barbie expects not only to encounter women construction workers but expects that they will support her with some "good feminine energy." She is confronted by an all-male situation where all the males make rude, objectifying, and sexist comments to and about her: "You got fries with that shake?" and "If I said you had a hot body would you hold it against me?" (ibid.) No, the real world is very far from Barbieland and is still very much a patriarchal one.

While Barbie is just a visitor to the real world, real women have to live there, which means to live under patriarchy. Consequently, it is only appropriate that the most important and most cited statement about what it is like for women to live in patriarchy comes not from Barbie but from one of the real women she encounters in the real world, Gloria, a real woman who has had to live her entire life in a patriarchal world:

It is literally impossible to be a woman. You are so beautiful and so smart, and it kills me that you don't think you're good enough. Like we have to always be extraordinary. But somehow, we're always doing it wrong.[sighs]You have to be thin but not too thin, and you can never say you want to be thin. You have to say you want to be healthy, but also you have to be thin. [...]You're supposed to love being a mother, but don't talk about your kids all the damn time. You have to be a career woman but also always be looking out for other people. You have to answer for men's bad behavior, which is insane, but if you point that out, you're accused of complaining. You're supposed to stay pretty for men but not so pretty that you tempt them too much or that you threaten other women because you're supposed to be a part of the sisterhood but always stand out. [...]It's too hard, it's too contradictory, and nobody gives you a medal or says thank you. And it turns out, in fact, that not only are you doing everything wrong but also everything is your fault. I'm just so tired of watching myself and every single other woman tie herself into knots so that people will like us. (p. 86)

This much quoted monolog aims to stand out as a summary of the critique of patriarchy the movie is engaging in. However, leaving aside the slightly contrived nature of the speech, at least two questions are worth raising. The first one relates to the hybrid genre of the film. Much has been made of its satirical frame and of its awareness of its own artificiality. Against this background then, such impassioned speeches strike a vaguely off note. While women will vigorously nod in agreement with the main points it makes, the fact that the speech is made possible by a crisis in a utopia created on consumerist principles remains problematic.

Many commentators and scholars have picked on this consumerist trap and questioned whether the film's creators and makers fall willingly or unwittingly in it. Leyla Kohn (2023) fears that "the film's dependency on its brand deals causes the feminist message to feel co-opted by Mattel as a marketing ploy" and is "skeptical of supporting this new wave of intellectual-property- and brand-based movies, as art becomes co-opted by consumerism, and thought-provoking messages on gender and society must be dumbed down to cater to brands' general markets and to increase sales." In his analysis of four different reviews of the movie, ranging from the right to the left, Bryant Sculos (2023) draws a more generous conclusion by suggesting that the questions *Barbie* does manage to raise outweigh the limitations of its set-up and its consumerist drive.

The second question alluded to above relates to the rather disturbing issue of "people liking us". The suggestion that women should stop tying themselves in knots to be liked is undermined by the very narrative of the film, which is rooted in and pursues precisely the idea of being liked (again). It is, in fact, the script itself that ties itself in knots by proposing a critique that demands to be taken seriously in obsessively pink hues and lightheartedness.

What, then, of the questions we raised at the beginning of this piece? Despite its satirical mode and its ambiguities, *Barbie's* depiction of patriarchy and its constant presentation of a nonpatriarchal world where both women and sisterhood reign is certainly a big part of the feminist appeal of this wildly, almost unbelievably successful film. *Barbie* presents patriarchy and brings it to the bar of judgment and condemns it just as *Manne* and *Promising Young Women* do with the various forms of male entitlement. Both films in their own ways do the work of feminist critique.

However, what do these feminist films say about and to men in this era of both the Me Too movement and its condemnation of sexist male behavior, and the return of and rejoicing in that

form of retrograde masculinity that is Trumpism? Both of these feminist films are certainly provoked by this era of Trumpism, an era brought to us by the fact that American white men in 2016 overwhelming voted for Trump despite his history of sexually abusing women and despite the fact that he was recorded on tape making light of it and even bragging about it. All this did not prevent 53% of American men from voting for Trump, and this more than anything brought us the era of Trump and Trumpism. (Of course, we should not be minimizing the sad, even tragic fact that 53% of white women voted for Trump in 2016). This more than depressing reality makes it difficult indeed to go back to 2004, when bell hooks wrote a very hopeful book titled *The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity, and Love*. Her main concern, as we have already seen, was patriarchy, a society dominated by men and by traditional maleness based on separation, domination, power, and when necessary violence:

Patriarchy is a political-social system that insists that males are inherently dominating, superior to everything and everyone deemed weak, especially females, and endowed with the right to dominate and rule over the weak and to maintain that dominance through various forms of psychological terrorism and violence. (p. 22)

At the same time, however, she proclaimed her love for men and called on feminism to be more compassionate toward and understanding of men. Men, she argued, can understand how patriarchy damages both women and men, and through this understanding men can develop the will to change. This is, in fact, exactly what feminism and women need: “we need men to challenge patriarchy...we need men to change” (p. xvi). That change takes the form of a genuine pro-feminist and very much changed version of masculinity, one that repudiates detachment, domination, and violence. This traditional, patriarchal masculinity she sees in men is “self-inflicted soul murder” (p. 155).

Surely widespread male voter support of a blatantly sexist and misogynist Trump in 2016 would make anyone rather despairing about the extent of hooks’ will to change within American men. But do feminists give up on men, or do we keep trying, as hooks would certainly have us do? If we do not give up, how do we stimulate in men what hooks called “the will to change?” This question reveals another aspect of the power and critical force of the film *Promising Young Woman*. The men in this film, unlike in *Barbie*, are actual men. They are intelligent, educated, are

themselves headed toward promising careers, as are many of the women they know. The men are nice guys. Everyone would say so and if you met them you would say so yourself. But in a particular situation, especially when in a group with other men, they could joke around, they could take advantage, they could be the nice guy who makes sure she gets home ok and, well, might as well see what he can make happen while being such a nice guy in this situation, and then do little more than joke around or brag about it with their male friends the next day. In short, many men who see the film *Promising Young Woman* may have the very uncomfortable feeling of seeing themselves in the men in the film, and you do not have to be a Hegel scholar to understand that the event of recognition could at least stimulate the beginnings of what hooks calls “the will to change.” This Hegelian hope reflected through bell hooks is another reason why this is such an important feminist film.

Promising Young Woman, unlike *Barbie*, is not a feel good movie for men or for women. Indeed, the film is both traumatizing and re-traumatizing for many women, and many women would not want to see it and/or should not see it. Men, on the other hand, should definitely see this film. If Trumpism has taught us anything, it is that we need many more men who have actually changed enough that they actually have a deep commitment to feminist issues. Simply being a good guy unthinkingly, desiring at least to be seen as a good guy, is not enough. What hooks means by the will to change means many things but at least it means repudiating a version of masculinity based on separation and distance, power and domination. It involves men becoming real feminist allies of women, and this involves a deep commitment within themselves to not harm the promising young futures of women.

The film *Barbie*, on the other hand, has no actual men. Of course in *Barbieland* the male-shaped figures are not actual men but Kens. Kens are shallow, stupid, puerile, petty, and perfectly useless. Not only are they not worthy of the Supreme Court or any other office that would require intelligence, but they actually have no purpose. Their purpose is beach, which is to stand on the beach. Not to be lifeguards but to simply exist on the beach. Kens are not only no threat to Barbies but they are also not equals, peers, real friends, partners, or even decent conversation partners. Kens simply exist to stand on the beach and hope that Barbies in some way recognize their shallow, pathetic existence. This is made obvious at the very beginning of the film when the narrator

explains: “Barbie has a great day every day, but Ken only has a great day if Barbie looks at him” (Gerwig and Baumbach, p.7). To reinforce this point, one of the first scenes of the film has Ken suggest to Barbie that he stay over at her house for the night, though he admits he does not really know why. To this timid suggestion, Barbie quickly replies: “oh, but I don’t want you here.” Well, that’s clear enough! But there is no real reason why any Barbie would really want any Ken here since they are perfectly useless. Barbieland is not bell hooks’ future where transformed, pro-feminist men have worked along women as allies to end patriarchy. It is not a place where women can have intelligent conversations with men about feminist, political, or social issues. It is not a place where men can discuss anything important intelligently. Though it could be said that Ken begins to evolve a bit and think with at least a hint of intelligence at the end of the film, his amazing insight he comes to that “once I found out that patriarchy was not about horses, I lost interest anyway” (p. 104) can hardly be taken for brilliance. This is not exactly what bell hooks was hoping for!

Entirely void of actual men with an actual brain, let alone of the pro-feminist male allies bell hooks hopes for, Barbieland is actually a world that puts on display and enacts Irina Dunn’s famous feminist adage “A woman needs a man like a fish needs a bicycle.” The film constantly makes painfully clear just how useless bicycles are in world of fish. Indeed, the film seems to take a certain delight in depicting just how useless bicycles are in Barbieland.

The men depicted in the real world part of the film are only slightly more animated Kens. The executives at Mattell stumble and bumble through this part of the film like Keystone Cops. Man as intelligent human being in male form, as a person any woman would really want to have a conversation with, could think of as an equal or as a friend, let alone as someone for whom a woman might have anything like desire, a man who has embraced hooks’ will to change, appears nowhere not only in Barbieland but also nowhere in the film *Barbie*.

This is how men appear or do not appear in the film. But what does the film say to men and what work of feminist critique can it do for men? Certainly, the critical capacity of the film is centered on the reality and on the concept of patriarchy. Just getting men to recognize and actually think about patriarchy may be a strong feminist achievement of this film. bell hooks back in 2004 in *The Will to Change* writes that over the years when she lectured on campuses or at other public

venues she was always surprised at how many men in the audience had never heard the word patriarchy or understood what it meant.

If this is still true, if there are still many men in 2023 and 2024 who have never heard the word patriarchy and do not even know what it means, then the power of *Barbie* to do important work of feminist critique should not be underestimated, despite its consumerist dimension. Even if we were to put that aside, the power of recognition compelling change within men is not nearly as strong in *Barbie* as it is in *Promising Young Woman*. Indeed, if many men experience recognition when they see the Kens of the film, we are all in a great deal of trouble. If this is so, it is perfectly understandable that the fish would want to live as freely and as fully as possible without the bicycles.

4. Conclusions

While we do not discount the potential of *Barbie* to do feminist critique, *Promising Young Woman* is a more powerful feminist film. It is a more powerful feminist film in terms of its attempt to incite in men that will to change that hooks hoped for, a hope that the election of Trump destroyed in many, undermined, at least, in perhaps everyone. In a world where real gender work was being done, just as many people have seen *Promising Young Woman* as have seen *Barbie*. This is, of course, very far from the case. What can we make of the fact that though *Promising Young Woman* was very well received by the critics and was even nominated for the Oscar for Best Picture, it had relatively little cultural impact and was actually seen by relatively few people whereas *Barbie* is a stunning, worldwide sensation and is the most popular film in many years? What can we make of the fact that while *Promising Young Woman* made 150 million dollars at the box office, *Barbie* has now exceeded 1.5 billion dollars and will certainly soon exceed two billion dollars? There is no question that the cultural impact of *Barbie* not only far exceeds the cultural impact of *Promising Young Woman*; it may well exceed the cultural impact of all pro-feminist films put together. It is in this that the true irony lies and where the satirical dimension begins to work against the team who made *Barbie* possible. Its wild success brings the word patriarchy into

the conversation but what ultimately wins the day is the public's desire to wear pink and feel good about continuing its complicated love affair with the plastic doll.

What can account for the worldwide smash that is *Barbie*? Is it the power of corporate capitalism to produce and market the movie and so to market two products at the same time, the doll Barbie and the movie *Barbie*? Is it because so many girls and women for so many decades now have various relations to the various forms of the doll Barbie? Is it because women of all ages in this age of both of #metoo and Trumpism are really drawn to the version of feminism in this film? All certainly contribute to the film's incredible success. If so many women in this age of Trumpism – when so many men voted for Trump, still support him, and will vote for him again – are drawn to, enjoy, and see more than once this feminist film where women rule in genuine sisterhood and men are stupid, shallow, pointless, and useless – who can blame them? The question remains, though, of just how profound the effects of this critique of patriarchy truly are.

The very different paths of these two films – not only the paths of their respective narratives but the paths of their public reception – can be seen as delivering a rather sobering warning. Patriarchy addressed in pink hues and within a make-believe framework is palatable to a surprisingly wide audience. Addressing male entitlement and its deadly effects remains a hard sell for the general public.

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Robert MANNING is Professor of Philosophy and Dean of Humanities at Quincy University. He is the author of several works on contemporary philosophy, especially Levinas and Derrida, feminist theory, and Holocaust Studies. He has been a Fulbright scholar in Romania.

Dana CRĂCIUN is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Modern Languages and Literatures at the University of Timișoara. She teaches courses in Literary and Cultural Studies, Creative Writing, and Translation Studies. Her research interests include contemporary literature and theory, conspiracy narratives, and the theory and practice of translation. She is also a literary translator and has translated more than twenty works of fiction by writers such as Salman Rushdie, John Steinbeck, Howard Jacobson, Muriel Spark, and George Orwell.

¹ The article was written in late 2023, so before the Presidential Elections of November 5, 2024. The percentages invoked refer to the 2016 elections and some statements reference a time when we could still hope that Trumpism would not return to power. Unfortunately, the overall argument regarding the strength of male entitlement has been reiterated by the results of these elections.