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POSTFEMINIST REPRESENTATION: MASCULINITY ON THE VERGE OF IDENTITY CRISIS

DIANA-MARIA CORNEA

College of Political, Administrative and Communication Sciences

diana.cornea@fspac.ro

Abstract: Numerous studies on the popular icon Barbie have focused on the representation of the character Ken. This study aims to investigate the extent of masculinity employed in Greta Gerwig's blockbuster picture Barbie (2023). I follow the film's use of post-feminist language to critique hegemonic masculinity's symbols and discuss theoretical issues such as gender identity crises and gender performativity.

Keywords: hegemonic masculinity, postfeminism, patriarchy, gender identity, feminism

1. Introduction

For many years, scholars have been intrigued by the Barbie doll and all the social implications that come with it (Yakalı, 2024). Various studies have examined the impact this toy can have on kids, particularly girls, and how it can influence gender roles, body image, and specific cultural ideals (Toffoletti, 2007). Barbie has always had the chance to change and adapt to the manner that culture has evolved (Yakalı, 2024).

With the release in 2023 of the movie *Barbie*, directed by Greta Gerwig and written by Gerwig and Noah Baumbach, Barbie's story changes significantly in several ways, including the role played by her partner Ken. Generally speaking, the movie *Barbie* has managed to stir polarizing reactions from the audience because through irony, humor and gender role reversal, the film criticizes by emphasizing the negative and dysfunctional aspects of society. More specifically,

Barbie is a funny critique of patriarchy and its effects on society, and the way in which representations of masculinity are used contributes to this critique in subversive ways.

The present article aims to explore the elements of postfeminist masculinity present in the film in order to reveal how masculinity is shaped and used. Starting from the four types of masculinity suggested by Connell & Messerschmidt (2005), but also focusing on the characteristic elements of hypermasculinity, I aim to outline the portrait of what could be called the postmodern man, represented by Ken.

2. (Representing) more than a doll

Because of its appearance, the Barbie doll has generated debate as well as interest, which has been mirrored in the academic world. Barbie has drawn criticism for representing a pattern of women as sexualized and objectified, which feeds and strengthens gender stereotypes that support the patriarchal society. Scholars have highlighted how Barbie represents an inaccurate image of femininity (Tang, 2023). However, at the opposite pole are the discourses that present her as a feminist role model. She offers liberating inspiration to growing girls, overcoming the boundaries of the maternal woman model, whose primary purpose is to be a mother (Yakalı, 2024). This contradictory, diametrically opposed viewpoint might possibly be one of the things that makes the Barbie figure so relatable, serving as a reminder of the challenges women in contemporary society confront in claiming their own identities. Barbie is a symbol of a character that exists in between historical and contemporary contexts because she is always changing and adapting.

Some consider that Barbie can even represent a mirror in which society's views on women are reflected (Tang, 2023). "The little girl pampers her doll and dresses her up as she dreams of being dressed and pampered; conversely, she thinks of herself as a marvelous doll", writes Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* (1949, p.340). In this statement, Simone de Beauvoir indicates how the objects that surround us and that we interact with can illustrate the way we would like to be treated. In this way, the doll might change from being just an ordinary object to a representation of the individual. The line "And maybe because I couldn't be like you, I ended up making you like me" is a reference to the relationship—almost an identity—that exists between the person and the doll in the 2023 film *Barbie*. Gloria, the character who utters these words, understands that she has

been expressing her feelings and anxieties to the Barbie doll, with whom she has developed a close bond, reflective of her own problematic positioning in the world.

Simone de Beauvoir's statement (1949) that we live in a society where girls are constantly assumed to be more verbal and sensitive, and boys more aggressive and socially immature, is probably still valid. This is perpetuated by the fact that "the gender role is psychologically determined first by parental and then by wider society's expectation" (Kellmer Pringle, 1974, p.16). Children gravitate towards a gender category, learning to be masculine or feminine from how they are treated. Clothing, toys, subtle differences in words, games, rewards, punishments and parental examples are just some of the elements that surround a child's universe and distinguish very clearly what is considered boy behavior and what is girl behavior (Kellmer Pringle, 1974). These aspects are also mentioned and confirmed by Judith Butler (2006), who directly indicates that gender is only a model taken over and internalized.

The meanings and definitions of femininity and masculinity are ideas that have been created based on viewpoints influenced by environment and culture. Gender is a social construct that represents a set of rules and expectations, which is why the act of identifying as a man or a woman is an act of performance. The way we act and express ourselves through our own gestures are behavioral aspects that we have learned, not something we are born with. Thus, gender becomes the repeated stylization of the body under the guidance of a particular model (Butler, 2006).

Even when we look at it through the lens of subjective psychological experience, identity is formed by a complex set of cognitive, affective and social interactions. These types of interactions take place at a given time and within specific contexts (Vignoles et al., 2006). Reflective evaluation serves as the basis of one explanation of the philosophical dilemma connected to questions such as "who or what we are," starting from the symbolic interactionist approach. The modification of an individual's identity in regard to the self-evaluations of those around them is represented by reflective assessment (Solomon, 1983). Thus, our identities are molded not just by our own self-characterizations but also by our perceptions of how other people in society view us (Yurchisin et al., 2005). The way that we express our identities is greatly influenced by the ways that we have been trained to oversee ourselves and maintain social norms and judgments.

Barbie dissects gender identity and emphasizes how gender is a performative concept. Therefore, it highlights the theories articulated by Judith Butler (1988), according to which gender is constructed based on social performances rather than innate traits. There is room for discussion of many facets of gendered life in the satirical and humorous tone that is employed in debates of the gender wars, criticisms of patriarchy, and the status of gender identities. Specific gender and identity issues are frequently highlighted in the media, and movies are crucial in forming societal standards. Postfeminism has proved to be a preferred framework within which these aspects can be addressed and discussed. This type of discussion foregrounds elements such as the sexualization of culture, consumerism, individualism, and the false freedom to choose or remake oneself, as well as the embodiment of femininity and gender roles. However, postfeminism's traits extend beyond femininity; the consequences are also clearly seen in the male model (Yakalı, 2024).

3. From Barbieland to Postfeminismland

There are three main spaces presented in the film: Barbieland, the Real World, which illustrates human space, and Kendom, the space of Barbieland after the implementation of patriarchy. The structure on which these spaces are built is an important element in the analysis and understanding of the political-ideological framework where the action takes place. Even if the three spaces have differentiating elements that we can easily identify, they are all rooted in an idea called postfeminism. While some studies consider Barbieland as a vibrant matriarchal and utopian society (Lubis, 2024), the underlying ideological structure remains postfeminism.

As its name implies, postfeminism refers to the period that follows feminism; yet, rather than referring to a continuation of existent feminist beliefs, it may even signify the rejection of feminism. The conversion of the feminist discourse into a popular cultural product is one of postfeminism's characteristics (Lotz, 2001). There are several kinds of discourse and opinions on gender roles and what they should be because postfeminism is not a unified ideology. (Gill, 2007; McRobbie, 2004). Similar to the neoliberal capitalist system of governance, postfeminism emphasizes individualism, self-empowerment, and self-regulation. Thus, postfeminism accepts and acknowledges the feminist demands achieved up to the present moment, but believes that such

a militant movement is no longer useful because that level of equality has been achieved (Gill, 2014).

Barbieland is known for having a clearly defined hierarchical structure in place. In a society where hierarchical institutions rule, meritocracy, rather than equality, is the ideal way of life. These political and intellectual forces not only oppose the elimination of social hierarchy but also provide new approaches to diversification. Ultimately, Barbiland's message calls for equality among all citizens, although hierarchy persists until the very end (Arruzza, Bhattacharya & Fraser, 2019). "When a hierarchical system persists, featuring varying degrees of power, marginalization, and everything in between, the system functions much as it always has" (Yakalı, 2024, p.2). The hierarchy that leads to exclusion and the existence of marginal groups gives birth to marginalized masculinity. Consequently, the existence of hierarchy is a factor in Ken's feelings of frustration and inferiority. The profound critique of the patriarchal system is illustrated by the constant change of gender in positions of power and leadership. The gender war is a hierarchical one.

In postfeminism, liberal feminist manifestations cannot offer solutions to current problems. These manifestations cause problems that perpetuate themselves and always take new forms. The goal of liberal feminism is to allow a small number of privileged people, including women, the opportunity to climb the corporate and military hierarchy. As an extension of liberal feminism, postfeminism focuses on the same elitist, superficial model, where ascension can only be achieved through one's strength. The only women who are given the power to climb the social ladder are talented women, an aspect that indicates the individualistic culture of society (Arruzza et al., 2019). The movie *Barbie* features all these successful women, who are Barbie dolls and have reached the pinnacle of their careers, who are independent and have their own homes, while the male dolls, called Kens, traditionally occupy supporting roles and are content with their supporting positions (Lubis, 2024).

The so-called gender wars, which are successful in polarizing viewpoints based on ideological differences, make use of the postfeminist media culture. These conflicts can lead to debates about the gender roles and identities by which we operate. These gender wars determine the reevaluation of classical, traditional roles, but also against feminism and the contradictory representation of leadership (Yakalı, 2024). In the case of such debates, elements such as the fight for gender equality, the redefinition of masculinities, and the role of intersectionality can have the

effect of aggravating these conflicts and, instead of solving them, of increasing their complexity even more (Gill & Donaghue, 2013).

In addition, the film suggests that despite the claims of feminism to have brought society closer to the ideal of gender equality, the patriarchal system along with its negative effects remains present, always taking on new forms. Barbie is a great example of a creation that effectively conveys the meaning of postfeminist symbols. The gender war itself serves as a metaphor for the movie's main issue and sparks heated discussions about who is right. Barbie's representation as a feminist figure offering solutions to women's concerns has been met with criticism, which has developed into a prominent subject that brings in money (Yakalı, 2024). As a result of the movie's enormous success and \$1 billion box office haul, many individuals began to view the feminist aspect as performative in order to increase revenue. Barbie's feminist persona, however, comes from the idea that the patriarchal system is the true adversary in the gender wars. Offering a viewpoint that questions gender norms and draws attention to issues related to masculinity, signifies a consistent and positive shift within post-feminist media culture (Yakalı, 2024).

4. Masculinity and its inevitable crisis

The film *Barbie* stands out also because its story is not only about Barbie and the identity crises she goes through in this process of knowledge and development, but about Ken's tribulations as well. The Ken doll appeared in stores in 1961, two years after the appearance of the Barbie doll. The doll was named after Ruth Handler's son and was intended to form this iconic duo, alongside the Barbie doll (Carlin, 2023). However, the Ken doll is more of an extension of the Barbie doll and Ken's identity is uncertain; the public knows very little about it. Just like in the movie, *he's doing beach*, his main trait being that he is an outgoing boy who spends the day at the beach. While Barbie is known for more than 200 jobs, such as president, Mars explorer, or robotic engineer, Ken does not have a job, which may indicate the reason why Ken does not own his own Dream House. These aspects shape an image of a passive, disinterested Ken who is also dependent on the existence of the Barbie dolls.

We cannot talk about the postfeminist element of the film without taking into account the male element and implicitly the patriarchal element, through the existence of the character Ken. In

this sense, the subject of masculinity plays as important a role as that of femininity. Masculinity is a social construct and has a material existence on many levels, whether we are talking about culture or institutions, as well as in the social definition and use of the body. The form of masculinity that is hegemonic at a given time and place involves a particular institutionalization of patriarchy. It may even embody a certain strategy of subordinating women (Connell, 1990). Male experience under the influence of patriarchy is conditioned to conform to a restrictive and unrealistic model of masculinity. This can be seen both internally, emotionally, and externally, in relation to bodily or stylistic standards. Men in patriarchy end up with limited social connections and support because they succumb to pressures to have certain kinds of achievements or to express their emotions in a specific way (White, 2024).

Identity crises are common in post-feminist societies. According to bell hooks (2000) in *Feminism is for Everyone: Passionate Politics*, cultures of domination undermine self-worth. So, the dominance and tyranny of one person create the idea of identity. This is also very clearly mirrored in the movie, as the masculinity of Ken's character is strongly associated with power, hierarchy, and patriarchy. bell hooks argues that men need to confront and critique the male-dominated world, as well as weaker men, women, and children. The lack of a clear model of what feminist masculinity means is reflected both in the crisis of men who try to be feminists and in the anti-feminist men who go to extreme forms. This identity uncertainty is responsible for crises of masculinity and for making the process of identity evolution difficult, by abandoning gender norms (hooks, 2000).

The crisis of masculinity is marked by a fractured and constrained masculinity (Kimmel, 2017). The crisis of masculinity, together with the reactions to the feminist current, led to the emergence of hypermasculinity and toxic masculinity. Hypermasculinity is defined as a developed form of traditional masculinity that is specific to the heteronormative patriarchal model. Hypermasculinity is based on the promotion of traits such as aggression and dominance, often physical. In addition to these we have emotional coercion and the devaluation of any elements or characteristics associated with femininity (Vokey et al., 2013).

Men are encouraged by patriarchal masculinity to exhibit pathological narcissism, infantile behavior, and psychological dependence on their advantages. This is determined only by the fact that they represent the male gender. In such a context, many men feel that their lives are threatened

if these privileges are withdrawn from them and this is because they have not formed a meaningful core identity (hooks, 2000). Postfeminism enables us to observe and analyze the intersection between heteronormative masculinity, which includes toxic masculinity and hypermasculinity, and the new forms of masculinity. In this way, a general image of masculinity can be created in the existing cultural-political context (Yakalı, 2024). Having access to both progressive and regressive narratives around masculinity, one can extract the elements that could lead to the sketching of the model of feminist masculinity that bell hooks talks about in *Feminism is for Everybody: Passionate Politics* (2000).

Following the feminist involvement of men, alternative forms of masculinity began to emerge, such as unheroic masculinities. These kinds of masculinities support intersectionality, equality, empathy, and emotional intelligence. It has been noted that the use of non-heroic masculinities in media productions denotes a shift from the way men are traditionally portrayed. Heroes are no longer seen as perfect; instead, they have weaknesses and imperfections. Such portrayal challenges conventional masculinity while also highlighting the characters' humanity (Gill, 2014).

Another type of masculinity that criticizes elements of toxic masculinity is postfeminist masculinity. The concept of postfeminist masculinity was introduced to signal a type of masculinity that focuses on empowering women while bringing subtle criticism to stereotypical masculinity. *Barbie* presents postfeminist masculinity in a caricatured manner. The film presents an unconventional and satirical exploration of the iconic universe of Barbie dolls (Lubis, 2024), which is intended to reveal the main aspects of toxic masculinity. Masculinity is often portrayed as inadequate or immature. Such a form of ridicule is intended to question traditional gender norms. By attempting criticism through humour, mixed feelings can be generated towards what postfeminist culture offers as representation. Critiques based on serious topics automatically become more accessible and entertaining, and alternative masculinities become more attractive than toxic masculinity or hypermasculinity (Yakalı, 2024).

In addition to these concepts of masculinity mentioned to explain the manifestations and evolution of masculinity in contemporary society, Connell & Messerschmidt (2005) identified four specific forms of masculinity, which have also been used (for e.g., Lubis, 2024) to analyze the masculinity presented in the movie *Barbie*. These four forms are as follows: hegemonic,

subordinate, complicit, and marginalized masculinity. The most dominant form of masculinity in a society is hegemonic, while subordinate masculinity refers to marginalized or oppressed forms of masculinity. Complicit masculinities represent forms of masculinity that are not dominant but benefit from the power structures created by hegemonic masculinity. The last type of masculinity is marginalized masculinity, which refers to forms of masculinity that are completely excluded from power structures (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Lubis, 2024). My analysis will use these forms of masculinity in order to better understand postfeminist masculinity, more specifically how it can be classified and what elements characterize it.

5. The need for a model of feminist masculinity

Once in the real world, with Barbie, Ken discovers the concept of patriarchy. A prime example is the scene on the beach, when Barbie and Ken experience different reactions to the attention they receive. Ken feels important and valued for the first time. Barbie, on the other hand, repeatedly confronts the effects of hypermasculinity and toxic masculinity through misogyny, sexualization, objectification, and verbal and physical harassment. Ken, however, enters a new space that allows him to step out from under the shadow identity lived in Barbieland.

Ken becomes increasingly eager to learn more about the patriarchy, motivated by the sense of happiness he feels when he discovers that it has a place in the real world. He makes the decision to go to Sasha's school library and finds himself moving toward a few books with certain titles. This action reflects the fixation with personal development in the post-feminist world, which is commonly achieved through self-help books, classes, or therapy (Yakali, 2024). The novels he selects are works of fiction with distinct, straightforward themes connected to the idea of hegemonic masculinity. The books discuss topics such as battle, horses, masculine domination, and patriarchy. Through his process of observing the real world, Ken offers his own definition of patriarchy. Ken views patriarchy as the domain of men and horses. This hilarious and extremely narrow definition reveals a great deal about Ken's simplified views about his own place in the reversed patriarchal structure Barbie presents. The scenario not only shows how Ken employs symbolic thinking to fit in with the male model but also how he satirizes and critiques patriarchy using aspects of postfeminist masculinity, including comedy. Hegemonic masculinity can be seen

in Ken's early belief that males rule the real world. It illustrates how men have historically been associated with authority and power in society (Lubis, 2024).

Lacking a feminist model of masculinity (hooks, 2000) in which to find himself, Ken chooses the patriarchal model because he does not know that there may be other alternatives. This places Ken in the role that many boys find themselves in today's society, that is, looking for a role model. A phenomenon encountered in recent years is the tendency of boys to move towards hypermasculinity values (Menzie, 2020). Also known as incels, or involuntary celibates, they often manifest forms of toxic masculinity and are part of online communities characterized by an anti-woman ideology. They are resistant to post-feminist culture, and this form of resistance emphasizes the forced intersection of gender norms and deep-rooted patriarchal attitudes (Stijelja and Mishara, 2022). They need to get as far away from femininity in gender identity and what it represents, but also redefine the term, coming with their own social conditions.

Femininity can exist under conditions that benefit men and implicitly the patriarchal system. As shown in the film, femininity was accepted when men wanted food, care, and companionship. Accepted women must be naive, smiling, and docile. These manifestations show us the situation of many female persons forced to perform gender roles in order to live in the system. In such a structure of gender hegemony, while femininity is positioned as inferior to masculinity, it becomes further devalued and regulated when it deviates from the conditions of femininity according to patriarchal norms (Menzie, 2020).

Scholars have used the word "anti-femininity" to describe the battle against femininity. The phenomenon known as "anti-femininity" is a reflection of societal standards that prevent men from participating in activities or acting in ways that are viewed as traditionally feminine. This conflict between masculine and feminine might manifest as thoughts, attitudes, or behaviors. It can also lead to power disparities and societal injustices. Toughness and anti-femininity are closely associated since femininity is associated with weakness (White, 2024). The greatest example of this hardness comes from the emotional side, where men are conditioned to repress their emotions to avoid appearing weak or challenging their dominant roles.

From the desire to remove the feminine elements, we can see the change in identity and clothing that Ken adopts. In Barbieland, the Ken characters dress in light pastel colors that can be attributed to the "feminine" color palette, but once he returns from the real world, Ken turns to

clothing items that symbolize status and masculinity. These aspects are seen in massive fur coats, leather jackets, or chains with large symbols, which are meant to attract attention and provide a dominant energy. Assigning certain colors, materials, or styles to a specific gender and moving so easily from one style to another, shows the performative nature of these gender manifestations. All of these elements that Ken adopts to shape his masculinity are taken from the themes of the books. Thus, the film identifies the symbols of hegemonic masculinity and deconstructs them (Yakalı, 2024).

Ken realizes that to succeed in real-world patriarchy, he needs education, financial resources, experience, and qualifications, just like women. He stumbles upon a society initially opposed to him, but in which, even if women do not occupy all the leadership positions, they still have occupations, and the rules apply to both genders. These new aspects indicate to him that in the post-feminist era, being a man in a patriarchal society is not as simple as he wants. In fact, he begins to feel discouraged by this system, which theoretically gives him all the privileges that he identifies with a certain gender, but which in reality requires him to make an effort and be actively involved (Yakalı, 2024). For this reason, Ken believes that patriarchy is not implemented correctly in the real world and decides to apply it instead in Barbieland.

His lack of necessary education causes him to be rejected for jobs when he applies. Ken then confronts the patriarchal society's postfeminist side. This forces him to examine his gender identity and acknowledge that being a man is not sufficient. He reaches the point where he wonders why being a man is not enough. Ken concludes that men in the actual world are not doing a very good job of preserving patriarchy or they do it in indirect ways, as suggested by one of his bosses' response that they hide it better.

A problematic idea that emerges is that postfeminists can use feminism as a front to appear as though they appreciate and embrace progressive norms. In actuality, the racist, sexist, and dominating traits are just concealed rather than destroyed. The Mattel management group is also present in real life. They stand for both players of neoliberal capitalism and emblems of hegemonic masculinity. They stand for the corporate and capitalist aspects of society. They aren't shown as particularly brilliant; instead, they are portrayed as duplicitous individuals who will act in accordance with progressive standards in order to preserve their social and economic standing.

6. A place for every man

A paradigm change is seen in Ken's metamorphosis and the establishment of patriarchy in Barbieland, which eventually becomes Kendom. Ken wants to feel more powerful, which is why all of his new identification elements—but especially the ones that show off his status and masculinity—are supposed to reflect that. As a means of achieving empowerment, the transformational paradigm—which is frequently connected to postfeminist media culture—usually stresses self-reinvention and change (Yakalı, 2024). As a result, Ken gains material and psychological advantages from the patriarchy, which contribute to the development of his self-esteem and confidence, which ultimately amount to little more than a thin facade. Ken becomes one with his belongings, and his new self is inextricably linked to his material goods. He is making motions to get respect, such as carrying many watches and sets of glasses on his hand. Ken even owns Barbie's home, which he furnishes with football memorabilia, miniature refrigerators, and exercise gear in order to maximize his performance in the genre he has selected.

Ken has built a setting where we can see his attempt to exert control over every part of Barbieland and to make authority and status seem imposed. Ken's acquisition of power and prestige allows him to maintain the societal projections of masculinity he craves, despite the fact that his toughness and anti-femininity have allowed him to cover his feelings of rejection in Barbieland and the real world (White, 2024). But Ken's comic shift and the creation of Kendom afterward flip this story, showing a metamorphosis that upholds rather than challenges patriarchal and hierarchical standards. Ken is successful in establishing patriarchy and founding Kendom. However, it reinstates conventional gender standards by placing Barbie dolls in submissive roles rather than acknowledging the role of women in society. Barbie dolls get to play the part of the perfect housewife, serving guys food and beverages and giving them massages.

Kens quickly accept and imitate any behaviors and symbols linked to hegemonic masculinity that they witness in the real world (Yakalı, 2024). As a result, when other Kens participate in hegemonic masculinity, complicit masculinity develops. Kendom's founding is significant because it establishes a hierarchy and modifies the balance of power. After this change, we may observe how, in certain situations, complicit masculinity can develop into hegemonic masculinity. Each of the other Kens understands that approving his proposal increases their own

power and helps them individually (Lubis, 2024). Because a hierarchical power relationship has already been established, in which Ken is superior due to his knowledge of this new idea of patriarchy, and because other Kens are motivated to change the status quo in which it is located, Kens do not question or criticize patriarchal standards. This could be an indication of men's general discontent with their subordinate status in the previous Barbieland.

Similar circumstances can give rise to subordinated masculinities and complicity. We may argue that everyone who is submissive to someone else is also an accomplice in the case of the community that Kens represents. One of the characters, though, most embodies the qualities of subservient masculinity. Even though the character Allan belongs to the group of male dolls, he is not a Ken. According to descriptions, Allan is a reserved, introverted person who doesn't actively question the dynamics of any power style. He is an example of subordination since he first agrees with the dominating social order without objecting actively participating in the oppression of female characters or challenging the current power system (Lubis, 2024). In previous analyses (White, 2024), Allan has been described as a character that exemplifies positive male attributes because he demonstrates empathy, connection, and discernment when using physical power or anger. Throughout the movie, he demonstrates his willingness to communicate his emotions and work with others. Since he does not conform to the enforced dominant masculinity, he tries to break free from the limits and subservient position of Kendom (Lubis, 2024). Allan, along with the other excluded individuals, takes up the task of challenging Ken's enforced norms. Characters like Sugar Daddy Ken and Magic Earring Ken represent marginalized masculinities. They face obstacles, are shut out of power structures, and fall under the category of weird puppets. Their segregation from other traditional groups and exclusion from the prevailing social structure are not the result of patriarchy but rather of Barbieland's and Kendom's hierarchical structures. Not only is hierarchy important, but their traits that are deemed "strange" also come into play.

7. Between war and acceptance

The movie uses Ken's journey to highlight the absurdity of such toxic traits. It starts from the anti-heroic character, who has states of identity insecurity and who wants to get attention and affection, and reaches a point of manifestation of toxic hypermasculinity through the exercise of

dominance in aggressive gestures and manifestations. The first is to be a bride wife, and the second is to be a long-term-low-commitment-distance girlfriend. This humorous framework is a critique of relational perspectives in society. While the bride represents a life-long commitment role, the second option represents a superficial interaction that is bound to fail. In the patriarchal society, men can have these totally opposite desires: one of having the affection of safety and the other of enjoying the state of a relationship without commitment, responsibility, or effort.

Ken's weak masculinity is shaken by Barbie's rejection of the proposal, leading him to engage in harmful behaviors. He shouts at her, making her look bad in front of a large gathering of people. This is a deliberate act of aggression meant to make her feel bad about herself in public. Furthermore, he uses a deceptive and even violent gesture to assert his dominance in front of Barbie, who injured him, as well as the other attendees, in order to hold onto his position of authority. Barbie's clothing is symbolically thrown out of the house to symbolize control and psychological assault. Applying the concept of gender performativity, I suggest that even toxic male behaviors are performative acts. They end up being implemented to shape the expectations of the implemented society, shaped by societal expectations rather than innate qualities (Yakalı, 2024).

Besides this, the framework depicts a harsh fact of contemporary society: "Patriarchal domestic violence is based on the belief that it is acceptable for a stronger individual to control others through various forms of coercive force" (hooks, 2000, p. 85). Compared to "domestic violence," the term "patriarchal violence" emphasizes that violence in the home is implicitly linked to male authority and directly tied to sexism and sexist ideology (p. 86). All sorts of violence are essential to the operation of capitalist society. Because the system can only be sustained by a combination of force (direct) and artificially created consent (Arruzza et al., 2019).

Another moment of performative manifestation of toxic behaviors is the violent act resorted to by the Ken dolls when they are turned against each other due to jealousy. Even though the scene is humorous and satirical, with unconventional outfits and weapons such as tennis racquets, beach toys and umbrellas, the film's fight moment references the gruesome acts of war-like violence that brutally happen in the real world, atrocious forms of destruction and violation of human rights that could be avoided. The beach serves as the physical battlefield where the Kens' war is fought, employing amusing forms of physical violence. Emotional release and management are the two

goals of this act, in addition to a performative gender role. Psychological and social warfare constitutes the second front in the fight. Men are unable to express their emotions because of hegemonic masculinity; the only way they can do so is by engaging in physical decompression. Such impulsive behaviors are actually deep states of misery and irritation that are easily controlled and brought out in the form of triggers, rather than being motivated by intricate and logical tactics.

After the men reconcile and let out their anger, the war scene ends. Ken is meant to conquer his manly dilemmas and find his own identity apart from the patriarchal society. As Ken begins to recognize himself as "kenough", he admits that he did not like the role of leadership and dominance because it was difficult. This is both a satire of the discourse of toxic masculinity, which holds that men are born leaders, but also an indicator of the behavioral, gendered constraints that can bring frustration and unhappiness when gendered social expectations do not align with personal experiences and values. Because his sense of self-worth was strongly tied to the amount of power and social standing he perceived, he felt the need to assert his position even though the role did not bring him fulfillment (White, 2024).

8. Conclusion

The movie *Barbie* (2023) has managed to cause polarizing but much needed discussions within our society. The movie encourages the audience to participate in an examination and critique of the postfeminist environment as a whole, regardless of the topics it addresses, including feminism, patriarchy, and ideas of masculinity. The film's postfeminist persona enables us to understand why feminism is still so important in today's world. Neoliberal feminism is becoming more and more popular in our culture, and instead of emphasizing the need for societal transformation as a whole, we observe how the focus is on individual and occasionally alienating personal strength. This trend obscures important elements of feminism and converts it into a commercial idea. The movie *Barbie* opens up a conversation about feminism, patriarchy, and ideas of masculinity in the mainstream because it is a crucial component of this postfeminist cultural environment. It is the peak of postfeminist writing, but it also carves out a space for thought-provoking conversations about changing ideas of masculinity and patriarchy.

The movie deconstructs the representations of hegemonic masculinity and, more significantly, demonstrates how pervasive patriarchy is in all of the settings it examines. Barbieland contains subtle, dynamic manifestations of patriarchy in the form of hierarchical institutions that determine the rise of marginalized and minority groups. In the real world, this is achieved through pretending feminism that is applied superficially to deflect focus from the ongoing racism, misogyny, and misuse of power. Furthermore, the absence of a female masculine role model in Kendom perpetuates patriarchy by giving males, especially the very young, no guidance as they explore their gender and identities. The problem is less gender than how we use it in regard to people around us.

The movie's humorous and sarcastic analysis shows how identity crises, which further complicate matters, are caused by competitiveness, power struggles, the use of violence, and the repression of emotions. These behaviors not only impede growth and contentment but also lead to competition. The film also questions the performative aspect of gender conventions. Despite the fact that the entire movie centers on the male and female genders, their representation shows that we are free to reject the social norms that have been instilled in us.

Ken serves as a metaphor for attributes that are present in many people in one way or another. Even though his learning process takes a while, in the end he understands that self-awareness can only be attained by letting go of the imposed gender norms, giving up on looking to Barbie for approval and attention, giving up on items that represented the status of hypermasculinity, and giving up control and dominance. As a result, Barbie the movie calls for the deconstruction of gender stereotypes and a shifting of the ideological environment.

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Diana-Maria CORNEA is a PhD candidate at the Faculty of Political, Administrative and Communication Sciences, Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca (Romania). Her doctoral research focuses on the exploration of identity within online communities, examining how digital interactions shape and challenge traditional understandings of self and belonging. She is particularly passionate about intersectionality and its applications in understanding complex social dynamics.