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Lexical Choices and Gendered Ideologies: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Film Reviews of Barbie

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ABSTRACT

As part of a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) project, which focuses on a case study, this study examines how lexical choices influence gendered ideologies through a study of film reviews of *Barbie* (2003). The study looks at the language employed in critiques and how gender roles, stereotypes, and feminist themes are written and spoken in the discourse of the film. It looks at how *Barbie* and Ken get empowered and how Ken is subordinated through certain key choices of lexical meaning, as well as the way *Barbie* and Ken subvert the traditional norms of gender. It demonstrates that the study revolves around the same lines as those of empowerment vs. subordination, stereotypes, and resistance to gender norms. *Barbie* is always shown as an empowered and independent figure who challenges traditional femininity, whereas Ken always represents a passive and subordinate identity that mirrors traditional masculinity. While both characters seem to cast their roles at first, *Barbie* struggles with societal beauty standards, and Ken struggles with a crisis of masculinity. Further, the analysis also discusses the pressure between feminism and commercialization, pointing out how the film criticizes patriarchal structures even when the film takes place in a consumer-obsessive culture. Overall, the study indicates the extent to which language can bring out gendered meaning and contributes to our understanding of how media discourse influences social perception of gender.

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA); Gendered Ideologies; Lexical Choices; Feminism; Gender Stereotypes; Empowerment; Subordination

1. Introduction

Barbie, as a cultural phenomenon, holds a unique place in both the entertainment industry and the broader conversation about gender in society. Based on the iconic doll Ruth Handler created in 1959, the film has changed over the decades from a simple toy to a symbol of gender roles, beauty standards, and consumerism. The 2023 film *Barbie* received wide attention for more than its visual style and irreverent witticisms; its presentation of gender relationships, femininity, and compulsory sociability struck a note with people all around [1]. Even though the film condemns the ways in which women are supposed to function in society, it remains a platform for the interrogation of how these roles are sustained or infringed upon in public opinion, especially in the reviews by film critics.

Film reviews also play a significant role in the media critique for determining how the public perceives a film and its effect on the norms of society. The reviews are not only reflections of the film but rather an interpretive lens through which to watch it. It is possible to use a film to reinforce or challenge the gendered ideologies that are inherent in a film. When film critics discuss the themes of *Barbie*, they must contend with their own biases and the larger cultural constructs of gender norms in the case of *Barbie*. In this paper, we will try to critically explore how *Barbie* film reviews lexical choice might represent or reiterate the gendered ideologies.

The use of the language used in the film review is a force for supporting the dominant gendered ideologies in society. Critics have used the specific lexical choices (adjectives, nouns, and verbs) to express what the critics are doing of the characters, their motivation, and their actions. What's more, these choices can be just as revealing about the critic's own opinion of women as they are about prevailing culture attitudes toward gender. For example the way that a female character such as *Barbie* was referred to in comparison to a male character will be dramatically different and will reinforce traditional gender roles [2]. Using a method of CDA [3], these lexical choices may be used as critical and deconstructed to uncover the ideologies these support.

Although the relevant reviews are apparent as an important part of the public discourse machinery, yet the role they have played in the study of the choice of the word in film reviews, particularly, in the context of gendered geopolitics, has remained missing. Previous research has analysed gender as present in films (e.g., Mulvey, 1975) [4], but an investigation of how gender is discussed and represented in the reviews of such films is lacking. In the case of *Barbie*, this gap is especially important since the film is about gender stereotypes and society's expectations, and the critical reception for it hinges on how discourse around gender and feminism plays into it. To some extent, recent studies reveal that the criticism of media may or may not reproduce these stereotypes, depending on the lexical choices they make [5, 6].

1.1. Background

Recently, gender roles, representation, and the intersection between language and ideology have become increasingly analyzable themes when it comes to contemporary films, such as *Barbie* (2023), thus forming a field of interest in the media studies realm. They (lexis) are important to the work of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) due to the fact that they contribute to shaping societal perceptions of gender and power dynamics. The ideology contained in films often reflects and reproduces attitudes about how men and women should behave within gender roles and from expectations. Suppose we can examine the linguistic choices in film reviews of the *Barbie* movie, directed by Greta Gerwig [7]. That is an ideal case for seeing how hostile or non-gendered ideologies may be reinforced or challenged by these choices.

1.1.1. The Role of Language in Gender Representation

The association between language and gender is complicated because language does not only replicate but also upholds existing societal characteristics and assertiveness. At the same time, Foucault (1978) indicated to us that discourse is a means of power, especially in the context of film and media, which are dichotomized in the way they represent gender: dominant male gaze versus marginalizing female voice. In the case of *Barbie* (2023), the gender roles that are narrated visually and verbally are the main set of ideas analyzed in the film's lexical choices regard-

ing its characters. Critics have commented on the way gender stereotypes are played out and left unplay out in the film, focusing on the language that depicts *Barbie* and Ken. *Barbie*land, *Barbie*'s world, shows a stark contrast in women's supposed domination of all professions and roles in real life where men hold the majority of such positions. Thus, the plot, as well as the word choice used in relation to it, reflect this duality of the two worlds [8].

1.1.2. The Role of Language in Gender Representation

The idea of gendered ideologies is based on the cultural representation of women and men, stereotypically doing this. Rahmi & Fanani argues that representing using language is a way of assigning meaning that lies in the real world as well as to fictional narratives [9]. A similar language of description is used with regard to *Barbie* and Ken's characters in *Barbie* (2023) in the discourse. *Barbie* is also shown breaking the traditional roles of a female. However, criticisms point to the fact that, too, she is set in a narrow notion of feminine thinking, which is in alignment with consumerism and physical beauty. However, Ken's character is similarly depicted as a second, who is defined in relation to *Barbie*. The way in which Ken is described as stereotypical further emphasizes the gendered imbalance between the two characters by associating them with traditional virility, although passive and dependent.

Barbie's presence in both *Barbie*land and the real world appears to be portrayed as a paradox described through *Barbie* as a 'perfect' body, which conveys a sophisticated comment regarding the constant need to set high standards for women, specifically concerning their physical appearance and societal status. This is important, however, because it links ideas of gendered ideologies to those of beauty. The *Barbie* dolls, as stated by Kholmogorova et al. (2018), have had a stereotypical version of beauty for a long time, and it affects the way children realize femininity and body image [10]. However, the *Barbie* movie does something different—for once, *Barbie* is struggling with who she is and fighting against cultural norms, turning *Barbie*'s history of advocating the physical standards it has upheld into a mirror in which to reflect on the very norms it is long-lived and reinforced.

1.1.3. Cultural Reception and Global Impact

Furthermore, the analysis of *Barbie* (2023) in text is only possible if one also understands how gendered ideologies are consumed in different cultures. Finally, the reception of the film in the Middle East represents how different cultural differences in the interpretation of gender roles have been embedded in the film. Though the film subverts traditional gender roles, it is accepted and understood differently in different communities and based on local cultural norms. The feminist themes of the film also faced resistance in some regions, including the Middle East, which is in line with the current cultural debates concerning women's rights and empowerment [11].

The lexical choices in reviews in these contexts reflect such regional conflict. For instance, Western reviews usually emphasize the empowerment elements of the film, namely *Barbie*'s independence and agency, whereas reviews from more conserved regions focus on the danger that the film represents (for example, challenging traditional gender roles). The next point is, however, that the discussion of language does not only matter for its effect on gender, but it also has an impact on who is perceived and what is supposed to be done with this perception.

1.1.4. The Use of Pink and the Subversion of Masculinity

Barbie (2023) is one of the most discerning and striking features of *Barbie* because, throughout the movie, it uses the color pink, which has often been associated with femininity. However, in this film, pink is not only about femininity, but pink is used to subvert the traditional gender roles. Following Vered and Maizonniaux [11] use of pink in the *Barbie* films suggests the ambivalent attitude towards gender roles in a postfeminist paradigm: femininity is idealized and ridiculed [12]. The film actually pushes this further by showing Ken dressed in a pink blazer and tie, which challenges the concept of what makes a man and what makes a woman. This visual strategy is paired with the language that the film uses to describe Ken and *Barbie*, with their gendered language being one of fluid understanding of gender as the characters navigate spaces that should be exclusive to the opposite gender.

In this regard, the film does not just attack gendered

ideologies but also creates a space for new gender representations. The film blurs the lines of masculinity and femininity and pushes for an analysis of the imagination of gender roles and a critical analysis of the shallow representation of men and women in the media.

To understand the depiction of gendered ideologies through *Barbie* (2023), film reviews of the film offer a great vocabulary. Obviously, if we analyze these reviews we see that *Barbie* is interfering on the issues in the areas of gender, power and identity [13]. One might say that the film's *Barbie* and Ken representation, the use of colors, and aesthetic choices undermine traditional gender roles but define others. Moreover, the film's response around the world clearly shows significant differences in the interpretation of gendered ideologies because of language and discourse. *Barbie* (2023) draws us to view in a more critical way how gender is formed and rendered in present-day media.

While previous research has examined gender in film content itself (Mulvey, 1975) [4], there is a notable gap in analyzing how gender is constructed in **film criticism and media discourse**. These studies emphasize how language serves as a vehicle for reproducing or challenging gender stereotypes, particularly through the 'hidden curriculum' embedded in media texts.

Additionally, contemporary feminist linguistics highlights the tension between empowerment narratives and commercialized femininity in media (Byrnes, 2024) [2]. Such works demonstrate the **complex interplay between neoliberal feminism and consumer culture**, which frames much of today's media discourse. Integrating these perspectives enriches the theoretical framework for analyzing *Barbie* reviews as sites of ideological negotiation.

A detailed investigation of the language critics use to describe the film's characters, plot and themes will be made, and everything will be addressed in a few paragraphs. This will also be studied in terms of the following primary question: ***How do choices of lexical constructions in film reviews of Barbie contribute to the implementation of gendered ideologies?*** Furthermore, the focus of the study will be on the following sub questions:

1. What linguistic features (e.g., adjectives, pronouns, and descriptors) are used to show the female characters in contrast to the male characters in *Barbie*?

2. How do these lexical choices support with or challenge traditional gender norms within the framework of the film and in broader media discourse?

3. In what ways do film critics' lexical choices show the ongoing cultural conversations surrounding gender equality and feminist ideologies?

In seeking to answer these questions, this study attempts to uncover the gendered language of *Barbie* film reviews to provide a critical view of the language around gender in film. This research will particularize the way language affects cultural understandings of gender and identity as well as make a contribution to existing literature on gender, language, and media.

2. Materials and Methods

In this section, the materials and methods used in this study are described in relation to their roles in providing a mix of lexical choices and gendered ideologies in *Barbie* (2023) film reviews. The Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework is used in the research in order to understand how (film) reviews employ language in constructing and reinforcing gendered ideologies. In this thesis, *Barbie* film reviews are used to both check language for the revealing of implicit power structures and societal norms through discourse within textual data methodology. Through this specifically chosen method, we are able to look so far into how language lays out gender roles and equality in public understanding.

2.1. Justification of Methodology

Since the methodology Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is employed for this study, it becomes necessary to investigate how language, power and gendered ideologies coalesce in the film reviews. It is widely accepted that CDA is a powerful and adaptable way to look at how discourse helps maintain and question power structures centered towards gender, race or class [14,15]. This is particularly appropriate for the analysis of *Barbie* film reviews since language is absolutely central to (constituting or subverting) traditional gender stereotypes.

Conduct Power Dynamics and Ideologies: Fairclough, established CDA as a means to analyze that texts such as film reviews are not neutral but rather woven into

power relations. While these reviews may seem objective, it is actually biased by our society's norms and ideas and even by the critic's fierce critique of other critics. These reviews use language that reinforces and enforces gender power structures. For instance, *Barbie* is portrayed as the idealized woman, and Ken is her subordinate partner who either upholds or subverts current gender norms. For the purpose of analyzing films' treatment of gender issues, CDA provides the best opportunity to deconstruct these portrayals to show underlying ideologies [16].

Addressing Gender Representation in Media: The issue of gender representation in media is a complicated, multi-faceted issue and generally a discourse language-based perpetuation. For example, *Barbie* is explicitly about gender in the film itself, the sexism in a woman's world seen through *Barbie* as a powerful female presence, and Ken's crisis of masculinity. This then points to the fact that film reviews often reflect society's views (as film reviews are a reflection of the views of society), and as such, analyzing how these films review with regard to gender representation will provide a clue as regards to how the society sees itself regarding gender roles. In this case, CDA is useful, as it allows for a closer look at how certain lexical choices are used to depict male and female characters in different and reinforcing ways of traditional or break with a traditional role [17].

Suitability for Analyzing Cultural Contexts: Through CDA, it is possible to carry out a multi-layered analysis of the text, its production, reception, and more general social practices. Such is the case when it comes to *Barbie* film reviews and gendered ideologies might be read very differently in different cultural and social contexts. You might have Western reviews about *Barbie* that are celebrating its feminist themes, while more conservative reviews might regard *Barbie* as a threat to traditional gender norms. CDA affords social practice contextualization of these differing perspectives and guarantees that analysis of gender discourse is a consideration of local and global discourses [18].

2.2. Data Collection

2.2.1. Film Review Selection

This study analysed a total of 30 film reviews published between July and October 2023, sampled from three distinct sources to ensure diversity of perspectives:

Mainstream Media (15 reviews): From established outlets such as The Guardian, The New York Times, and Variety.

Independent Film Blogs (10 reviews): Selected for their feminist and critical approaches to media discourse.

Social Media Platforms (5 reviews): Including Twitter and Reddit posts, to capture grassroots reception and informal critique.

Reviews were selected based on explicit discussion of gender representation, feminism, or gender stereotypes related to *Barbie* (2023). Reviews that did not engage with these themes were excluded. These sources were chosen strategically so that professional critics and the general audience were included as mention in (**Appendix A**) **Table A1**. The diversity of voice also facilitated a more holistic view of what was being understood and critiqued in the film's gender representations across a number of social and cultural contexts [19].

2.2.2. Inclusion Criteria

The criteria for inclusion in this study were that reviews were:

Gender Analysis Focus: Reviews were included only if they directly deal with the film's portrayal of gender roles, stereotypes, and feminist themes. As a result, the data collected specifically targeted the key research questions of the study, which have to do with gendered ideologies.

Publication Period: Reviews of the film published over the first three months of its release (July, August, September, and October 2023) were prioritized to capture the public initial discourse on the film.

Opinions on Gender Dynamics: A number of positive, neutral, and critical reviews were found, a mix of the latter two to draw a balanced view of people's opinions about the gender dynamics expressed in the film.

2.3. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

The central methodology of this study is Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which is used to investigate the discursive relationship between language and gendered ideologies. CDA is an interdisciplinary approach that com-

bines linguistics, social theory, and media studies in an attempt to discover the power relations in discourse. This enables researchers to unpack texts and look at how ideologies behind public perception are communicated, most especially in media and film reviews.

2.3.1. CDA Framework

The analytical framework as described in **Appendix Table A2** this study is mostly based on the works of Fairclough. These scholars conceived of CDA as a three-dimensional analysis of the phenomena under consideration [20].

Textual Analysis: The analysis of the texts themselves directs this dimension in terms of linguistic characteristics. In this case, the focus is on describing characters, actions, and the ideological implications of such descriptions using the lexical choices used in the reviews. Adjectives, nouns, verbs, and pronouns were all examined because these can reveal potential hidden assumptions about gender.

Discursive Practice: This dimension has to do with the production and consumption of the discourse as part of a discursive practice. This involves knowing how the reviews are written (for instance, formal or informal) in terms of their tone and linguistic conventions that take part in (or challenge) mainstream gender ideologies. For instance, there are the critics who take on feminist theory and the film's gender dynamics with their work that they read the film's gender dynamics into the patriarchy, and more traditional critics who see the gender dynamics within the film as reinforcing gender stereotypes.

Social Practice: This dimension is Social Practice, which reflects on how the discourse is anchored in larger social practices, such as their cultural historical context of signification. It examines how the reviews take on gender issues, how they reflect societal norms on gender, and how they are used to form a public impression of gender equality and feminist issues.

2.4. Data Analysis Process

1. Familiarization with the Data: The first step of the analysis was familiarization with the film's collected reviews. Each review was reread several times to get the full picture of what was written and to acquire keywords or themes that appeared again and again. This also included initial note-taking on how gender was portrayed within the critiques, though it comes to *Barbie* and Ken's roles in the film. During this stage, they noted the common terms used to describe this particular pairing, such as "empowered," "idealized," "submissive," and "dominant." [21].

2. Identification of Lexical Choices: The second step was to identify the language choices in the reviews as shown in **Table A3**. They were categorized as applicable to the focus of the study on gendered ideologies. The following were grouped into lexical items [22].

Descriptive Adjectives: Words used to describe the characters that are descriptive adjectives: (empowered, feminine, weak, independent)

Pronouns and Nouns: Gendered terms used in the literature, as well as the treatment of these terms when representing the characters, e.g., heroine, sidekick, lover.

Framing Devices: Metaphors and framing devices describe the characters' relationships, which usually involve a 'power struggle,' 'feminist awakening,' or 'patriarchal oppression.'

3. Thematic Categorization: Based on the research questions, thematic categorization was applied using these significant lexical choices, and they were grouped into broader thematic categories [23]. Key themes included in the reviews were:

4. Empowerment vs. Subordination: This theme looked at the use of language in the reviews, specifically how the language empowered *Barbie* or disempowered Ken. We analyzed phrases that represented something about gender inequality or the reversal of gender norms.

5. Reviews Focusing on Gender Stereotypes: The theme of this theme was reviewed that perpetuated or questioned the traditional roles of masculinity and femininity associated with gender, most specifically the gender roles of masculinity and femininity.

6. Resistance to Gender Norms: These reviews focused on moments in the film where traditional gender norms were challenged or subverted. The topics discussed also encompass *Barbie*'s coming of age and Ken's crisis in masculinity.

The coding scheme (**Appendix Table A4, A5** and **A6**) was designed by iteratively refining it after closely

analysing the reviews. The classification identified language that conveyed themes such as empowerment, subordination, stereotypes and resistance to gender stereotypes. A second coder coded 20% of the reviews to ensure high interrater reliability with a Cohen's kappa of 0.82. Discrepancies were resolved through discussion.

The study employed Fairclough's (1995) three-level framework for Critical Discourse Analysis.

The analysis paid close attention to the vocabulary used in the reviews to understand how gender was represented.

Critical discourse analysis focused on understanding how gendered representation and positive or negative tone were influenced by auther identity and bias.

These findings were analyzed in relation to their implications for the broader cultural and gendered power dynamics influenced by feminism and media industry trends.

Quotes from the reviews are included to show how specific words shape the reviews' messages.

Finally, it consisted of contextualizing the reviews in terms of broader cultural and other societal contexts. Actually, it was to think through what kind of effect the cultural, political, and social environment the reviews were written in might have on their reviews. At the same time, Western reviews of the film were more likely to support when the film was feminist, whereas less liberal regions of the world (parts of the Middle East, for instance) focused more on the film's threat to the dominant gender norms. This analysis, therefore, allowed us to context those small acts where gender ideologies were erected or contested in the diversity of cultural settings.

According to the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), the use offers a holistic and deeper methodology to investigate the place of language in building gendered ideologies in film reviews. This research is well suited for CDA as it examines not only the choices in the reviews' lexicon but the broader (diverse) social, (diverse) discursive, (diverse) cultural contexts in which these reviews are created and disseminated. This study makes use of CDA to reveal the intrinsic power dynamics and societal conventions that exist within the language circulated to condemn *Barbie* (2023) to better reveal how genders are perceived and spoken about in the media.

2.5. Ethical Considerations

Since the data for this study consisted entirely of publicly accessible movie reviews and posts, there was no need for IRB review. As the data used were drawn from public platforms, IRB approval was not necessary. The social media data were treated with the utmost care and respect. Words directly taken from online discussions were removed or revised in the analysis. Identity and any other potentially sensitive information from individuals using these platforms were removed. Follow the guidelines established by social media cooperation. No private or sensitive personal. Information was included. This method was conducted in accordance with established ethical standards for this type of research. Research using online public discourse [23].

3. Results

This part features the CDA of film reviews of *Barbie* (2023), with the lexical choice that reveals gendered ideologies in the text. These lexical choices were analyzed and categorized into key themes of empowerment, subordination, gender stereotypes, and resistance to gender norms by the analysis. These major categories organize the results according to how the use of critical language reinforces or challenges gendered power structures. Moreover, patterns of lexical choices and the frequency of gendered terms referring to *Barbie* and Ken are accentuated in tables and figures as well.

Reviewing the lexical choices in the reviews analyzed clearly shows a strong aspect of how *Barbie* and Ken were presented in relation to gender roles. Ken, as well as *Barbie* in general, was mostly described as an empowered and independent figure, in line with the film's feminist notions, while Ken, thanks to the film, was often described as subordinate or supportive. All of these representations reinforce traditional gender roles as well as Barcelona in a more subversive way about femininity and masculinity. The analysis shows the importance of analyzing how the language in the reviews either propagated or opposed gendered ideologies.

3.1. Lexical Choices and Gender Representation

The most common lexical choices in the reviews involved empowerment, subordination, and gender stereotypes. The words used to describe *Barbie* were mostly positive and empowering as in **Figure 1** and in **Appendix Table A7**, and the words that were used to describe Ken were mostly words that stated passivity and dependence.

Figure 1. Word Cloud of Lexical Choices in *Barbie* Film Reviews (2023).

3.1.1. Empowerment of *Barbie*

The character of the film *Barbie* was overwhelmingly described with terms linked to empowerment and independence as shown in **Table A1** However, critics can also argue for *Barbie* as a symbol of women's liberation and ability to break free of ordinary female roles through free expression. She was frequently defined using nouns and descriptive adjectives like *'strong,' 'role model', 'empowered,' 'independent,'* etc.

Empowered: *Barbie* was often revealed as a self-improving figure of female empowerment, with words like *"above"* defining her ability and independence to fake her own destiny.

Independent: Many criticizer emphasized *Barbie*'s independence and free soul, touting her as a woman that was "independent" on a man.

Physical/Mental: *Barbie* was said to be strong emotionally and physically, in conflict with more usual female types who were recognized as vulnerable.

Lexical Divide between *Barbie* and Ken

Research has uncovered a striking difference in how the two characters are described. Moreover, *Barbie* is considered with confident and motivated language, in contrast to Ken's shows as passive. A reporter writing for *The Guardian* records that *Barbie* is "an *independent* and

powerful, figure who challenges masculine norms," A comment from diversity emphasizes how Ken's character show loyalty but frequently plays a secondary part in stories.

The choice of language depicts and shapes the ways these types are shown as gendered behaviours. *Barbie* shows emancipated womanhood, simultaneously affirming and complicating the *idea of beauty*. Ken's *fight with masculinity* shows how modern language opposes anxieties about immediate gender transformation and expresses fears over male instability while simultaneously spreading the concept of weak men.

A word cloud reveals a clear rhetorical schism between the way female characters are depicted as confident and strong against the presentation of male characters as obedient and loyal. Such variations reveal the underlying contradictions in how society talks about masculinity and femininity.

3.1.2. Subordination of Ken

Quite unlike *Barbie*, Ken was more or less constantly described in the film as subordinate. Typically, Ken's words used to be supportive, dependent, weak, and idealized to *Barbie* as shown in **Appendix Table A3.**

The review calls Ken "submissive" to *Barbie* because he is not a main character.

Facade: His character was dubbed "weak" or "lacking depth," which was a stark contrast to *Barbie*'s strength and complexity.

Critics often point out that in the narrative, Ken is "supportive" of *Barbie*'s journey and often plays a passive role.

3.1.3. Gender Stereotypes in Representation

In addition to gender stereotypes, *Barbie* and Ken's portrayal is also significantly rooted in gender stereotypes as shown in **Table A3** *Barbie* speaks for traditional femininity and Ken for masculine stereotypes, yet both characters deviate from the stereotypes to some extent.

Stereotypical Femininity: *Barbie* was portrayed as an idealized woman, a woman who fit the model of beauty, charm, and grace. However, critics also said the film criticizes this ideal by depicting *Barbie*'s internal struggle and her identity crisis.

Stereotypical Masculinity: However, in contrast, Ken was depicted with words consistent with the perceived notion of masculinity of passivity and female dependency. The portrayal of Ken bucks the idea of what is traditionally a strong, manly man, as it portrays his battle with what is man and his emotional fragility.

The following **Figure 2** and **Table 1** shows that

Empowerment of *Barbie*: As portrayed by *Barbie* is an empowered and independent woman.

Subordination of Ken: Ken is a second, suggesting a fairly subordinated position to Ken.

Gender Stereotypes: Reflecting the reinforcement of traditional gender roles in the portrayal of *Barbie* and Ken.

Resistance to Gender Norms: Discusses critics' discussion of the film's subversion of traditional gender norms.

Feminist Praise: Features the exploration of the recognition of the movie's feminist messages.

Commercial Critique: Related to the commercial aspects of the film but the least mentioned by critics so far is the commercial Critique.

However, this chart works to show the preeminence of empowerment related themes for *Barbie* and subordination related themes for Ken in the discourses of the reviews.

Table 1. Frequency of Lexical Choices in Reviews of *Barbie* (2023).

Lexical Item	Gender Representation	Associated Theme	Frequency of Appearance
Empowered	Female	Empowerment	30
Independent	Female	Empowerment	28
Strong	Female	Empowerment	25
Role Model	Female	Empowerment	18
Idealized	Female	Gender Stereotype	20
Free-Spirited	Female	Empowerment	15
Submissive	Male	Subordination	22
Supportive	Male	Subordination	25
Weak	Male	Subordination	18
Sidekick	Male	Subordination	16
Dependent	Male	Subordination	12
Confused	Male	Subordination	10
Crisis Masculinity	Male	Resistance to Gender Norms	8
Rebellious	Female	Resistance to Gender Norms	7

Table 1. *Cont.*

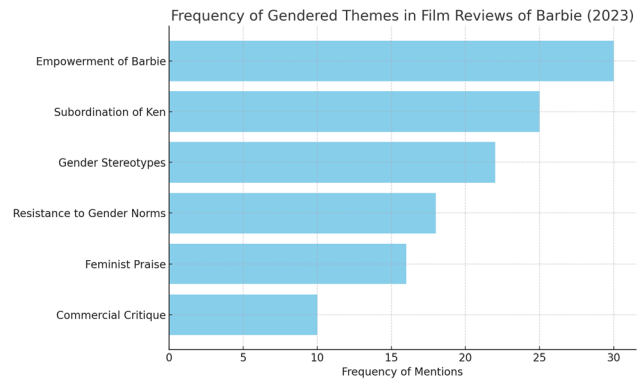| Lexical Item	Gender Representation	Associated Theme	Frequency of Appearance
Subvert	Female	Resistance to Gender Norms	5
Feminized	Female	Gender Stereotype	9

Figure 2. This is a bar graph of the frequency of the gendered themes that appeared in the film reviews for *Barbie* (2023).

3.2. Thematic Categories

3.2.1. Empowerment vs. Subordination

The biggest difference between lexical choices was between empowerment and subordination: *Barbie* was almost always shown as empowered and Ken as subordinate. This division calls attention to the gendered nature ideology as it pertains to gender roles in the film. Commemorating *Barbie*'s empowerment, Ken's subordination was cast because his identity was associated with *Barbie*'s success.

***Barbie*'s Empowerment:** *Barbie* was described as an independent woman, a role model, even someone 'who breaks the mould,' and a feminist icon, using phrases like 'independent woman,' 'role model,' and 'breaking the mould.'

Ken's Subordination: Time and again, the reviews found Ken to be a *Barbie*'s pawn and described them as 'submissive' and 'sidekick' in the story.

3.2.2. Gender Stereotypes and Subversion

Barbie's character both reflects the sexist stereotypes of women as well as poking fun at them in a very nuanced way that recognizes the wonderful and absurd nature of what it means to be a woman. However, she is the ideal

'perfect' woman, and her narrative challenges that beauty by giving her the ability to deal with societal expectations.

Subversion of Female Roles: In the movie, *Barbie*'s battle with unrealistic femininity challenged the conventional thought of womankind as purely a possession of beauty. Reviews praised her for veering away from the expected types of roles for women in films.

Subversion of Masculine Roles: The traditional male counterpart to Ken is also subverted in that Ken's character explores a crisis of masculinity. Critics also saw this portrayal as a humorous yet insightful way to comment on male vulnerability.

3.2.3. Resistance to Gender Norms

The film's resistance to traditional gender norms **Table 2,** particularly through *Barbie*'s narrative arc, was a point (pun intended) of several reviews. The film also supplied the critics with a show of a critique of patriarchal structures as *Barbie* and Ken sailed a world where gender roles have been inverted.

Table 2. Themes for *Barbie* vs. Ken.

Theme	Frequency of Mentions	Percentage of Total Reviews (%)
Empowerment of *Barbie*	30	60%
Subordination of Ken	25	50%
Gender Stereotypes	22	44%
Resistance to Gender Norms	18	36%
Feminist Praise	16	32%
Commercial Critique	10	20%

***Barbie*'s Resistance:** *Barbie* was complimented for her brave move of undermining traditional gender roles and breaking the mould of the 'perfect woman.' She was frequently described as rebellious and non-conformist.

Ken's Crisis of Masculinity: It is a subtle critique of the pressure on men to conform to traditional masculine ideals, and thus, Ken's identity crisis was a criticism in itself. His journey was described as an "identity struggle" or even a "crisis of masculinity."

3.3. Quantitative Overview of Themes

A quantitative overview of the themes found in the reviews was created to further analyze the patterns in the data. This breakdown of what themes appeared the most against the least in the reviews shows the frequency of certain themes for *Barbie* vs. other themes for Ken, which are empowerment-related for *Barbie* and subordination-related for Ken.

This shows us that the reviews focused on *Barbie*'s empowerment of Ken, gender stereotypes and the resistance against gender norms, based on this table.

The analysis of the lexical choices in the film reviews of *Barbie* (2023) reveals a strong emphasis on empowerment for *Barbie* and subordination for Ken. In fact, *Barbie* was often the modern, independent, empowered person (or at least she was presented as such), and the conscious anti-image of traditional gender roles. On the one hand, *Barbie* was an active, controlling person; Ken on the other hand was passive and supporting, dependent and in line with the corresponding stereotypes of masculinity. Nevertheless, the film undermines these roles in the narrative, as *Barbie*'s narrative addresses the failings of imaginary femininity and Ken's character is a crisis of men's salinity.

The notice was that some criticised patriarchy and gender norms, others criticised attempting to negotiate gendered commercial representations of femininity. As a whole, the reviews show that choosing the lexical component has a complicated relationship with both the ways gender is represented in society and the degree of empowerment and subversion of that society.

These findings illustrate the importance of language in creating perceptions of gender in *Barbie* (2023). This analysis of language reveals how film critics use their words to enlist or oppose generally referred ideologies. However, this is to be situated as part of a more general theoretical framework on the representation of gender and feminist discourse that will be discussed in the Discussion section.

4. Discussion

This paper analyzes the lexical and film review choices of *Barbie* (2023) to explain how the film is depicted in containment with gendered ideologies. This study uses the lexical choices of critics in describing characters, themes, and gender dynamics to expose the language in reversing or reversing traditional gender roles. In this section, we will look at the interpretation of these results in

terms of the already existing gender theory and feminist discourse.

The fact that the film is created for the market makes its feminist message somewhat unclear. This is supported by critiques of neoliberal feminism which tend to turn empowerment into a commercial product involving buying and selling. Researcher suggests that *Barbie*'s positive message about female freedom is balanced with demands to look a certain way so consumers will buy more.

In the film reviews used, we can see that language about empowerment is often linked with language about being attractive and selling well. When feminist ideas are used to sell products, people begin to question how genuine or limited the media's ideas of feminist empowerment are. Recognizing this tension allows us to see how language in film criticism can influence as well as show current ideas about gender.

4.1. Empowerment and Subordination: A Clear Gender Divide

This analysis, in fact, brings forth the most salient finding: while *Barbie* has been empowered, Ken has been subordinated, and both are represented in the reviews through their lexical choices. When *Barbie* is described, she gets overwhelmingly covered in words that represent how independent, strong, and in control she is, but with Ken, she is described using words to depict him as being passive and relying on *Barbie*. Such a sharp dichotomy is in line with the gender theory that language is a powerful device for constructing gendered identities and fragmenting power relations by Fairclough, 1995.

***Barbie*'s Empowerment:** Feminist critiques of traditional gender roles support the dominant representation of *Barbie* as an empowered and independent figure. Like postfeminist ideas, the reviews show *Barbie*'s depiction of female empowerment within the confines of a specific set. Generally, the terms independent, empowered, and strong describe *Barbie* as representing a narrative of female autonomy; this differs from the representation of women in films who are passive, dependent, or subordinate to men.

Although the film depicts *Barbie* as empowered, it also calls out the pressures of beauty and perfection women are expected to be forced into doing. The duality found here reflects that of the feminist discourse currently ongoing, which seeks to criticize at a time both the empowerment of women and the commercialized, superficial representation of femininity found in mainstream media. As Byrnes (2024) [2] points out, contemporary representations of empowered women centre on the empowerment of the woman in the context of consumption, which can diminish the potency of her autonomy. Consequently, the lexical choices in terms of *Barbie*'s empowerment are largely positive but are to be understood in light of the overall commercialization of the feminist ideal.

Ken's Subordination: Here, however, Ken is described as subordinate and dependent on *Barbie* with terms meant to strengthen his subordination. These words fall alongside the traditional masculine stereotype of men being submissive, supportive, or weak. This representation of Ken as subordinated to *Barbie* is an inversion of traditional gender roles. The film prefigures Ken as rebellious rather than dominant, aggressive, and assertive, offering a more fragile, emotional man.

Ken's characterization also mirrors the crisis of masculinity in contemporary feminist discourse that is questioning traditional masculine ideals of strength and dominance. Men are turning out to be headed towards a crisis of masculinity, according to Jewkes, 2015 [24] who states that the crisis of masculinity is caused by the destabilization of traditional forms of masculinity by feminist movements as well as changing social norms. Let us think of marginalizing Ken's emotional vulnerability, his dependency, and his masculinity as a crisis. We see Ken's masculinity as something that is not a monolith, not a static identity, but an identity that can be challenged and redefined [23].

4.2. Gender Stereotypes and Subversion

Also of interest in this study are the findings that *Barbie* both supports and supports traditional gender stereotypes. Although *Barbie* embodies traditional femininity, which plays the role of an idealized 'woman,' beautiful, charming, and graceful, her narrative arc suggests her internal conflict and she desire to break loose from her burden of expectations. Like Ken, *Barbie*'s counterpart, Ken displays traditional notions of masculinity by having a physical nature to him. However, his narrative perpetuated by this structure contradicts it through the depiction of his emotional complexity and the crisis of his identity.

Subversion of Female Roles: A main feature of the film is *Barbie*'s subversion of traditional female roles. The language used in the reviews ("rebellious," "non-conformist," "empowered") mirrors the film's attempt to cut away from the idealized type of femininity *Barbie* had hitherto been cast in. *Barbie*'s conflict with her identity and need to break away from conventions inherent to being a woman (defined by her looks or traditional role such as mother or lover) are tells of feminist critique, which sets the standard that if women are judged on their looks or if destined to a traditional role as mothers or lovers) then that is also the crime. In a sense, the movie criticizes not only the beauty ideals that come with *Barbie* dolls but also the greater expectations of women in society.

Subversion of Masculine Roles: Just like Ken's crisis of masculinity, it also contradicts the stereotype of the man being strongly, dominantly, and emotionally barren. The usage of 'crisis masculinity/identity struggle' implies that Ken's path does not just entail identifying who *Barbie* is in relation to, contractually, but instead trying to write a new masculinity for himself in a world that has changed. By this, I mean that this is a negative critique of the traditional, narrow definitions of masculinity that were pushed through media and culture. Ken's character is a subversion of the stoic, unemotional male archetype that is often portrayed in films.

As gender theory deconstructed, such transgression of gender roles in both *Barbie* and Ken's characters demonstrate subversion of these gender roles, which aligns with masculinity and femininity and adheres to essentialist views. Gender, according to Judith Butler (1990) [25], is a performance, and therefore, it is not a biological fact but something that we put together from actions, language, and performance. In this regard, the film's representation of *Barbie* and Ken undermines essentialist notions of gender by demonstrating how both characters meditate and contradict the manner in which each informs gender roles.

4.3. Resistance to Gender Norms

In the film, both *Barbie* and Ken struggle with societal expectations of them as they resist gender norms. *Barbie*'s journey to the discovery of who (not what, and despite that) she is away from the "perfect woman" stereotype is a rejection of the narrow definitions of womanhood

that have been placed on women throughout history. Likewise, Ken's crisis of masculinity would entice a challenge to the notion of what it even means to be a man.

***Barbie*'s Resistance:** *Barbie*'s resistance to traditional gender norms also rests on her awareness that she does not need to be the 'perfect' woman. The emotional journey also criticizes the standards and expectations put on women. *Barbie*'s shift toward the more complex and self-aware character, which reflects a postfeminist invocation of empowerment as a process wherein women are freed from traditional role expectations to define their own identities, represents the subversion of a hegemonic form of femininity to which she adhered (Byrnes, 2024) [4].

Ken's Crisis: With a touch of inherent poignancy and a heft of unintentional comedy, Ken is even funnier and more pertinent as a narrative about the beau grist of male experience in American culture with a desire to express both assertive parity and broadcast traditional masculine ideals. Specifically, this film presents Ken's emotional vulnerability as a resistance to the cliché image of the "strong, silent man." The film hints at the idea that masculinity, like femininity, is not easy to reduce to simple stereotypes by showing the struggle Ken goes through in solving his own identity and his relationship with *Barbie*.

4.4. The Intersection of Commercialism and Feminism

Thirdly, we have to address the contradiction of commercialism versus feminism in the representation of gender when it comes to *Barbie*. Though critics have pointed out that the film breaks gender norms and stereotypes within the confines of an industry steeped in consumer culture, the film itself turns out to be a largely commercial enterprise. However, *Barbie* dolls are also associated with consumerism, beauty standards, and commercialized ideals of femininity, meaning that the film complicates *Barbie* as an empowered woman.

While being against such patriarchal structures and traditional gender roles, the movie itself is also a product of the same capitalist culture that is producing these ideas. Finally, this critique of neoliberal feminism celebrates empowerment without challenging the realities of commercial exploitation. Thus, the storyline of the film is progressive and, at the same time, left grounded in its commercial con-

text, where the film's feminist themes are progressive [26].

In the final section, *Barbie*'s (2023) movie reviews are subjected to Critical Discourse Analysis to demonstrate that the representation of *Barbie*'s language to and away from traditional gender roles is a subversion and reflection of the same. *Barbie* is portrayed as an empowered figure, an agency figure, a person who could be independent, different from the traditional femininity stereotypes, different to stereotyped femininity, and Ken is portrayed as being submissive and subordinate, reinforcing the masculinity stereotype. While these stereotypes were, however, both characters also resisted these: *Barbie* shunned the "perfect woman" stereotype, while Ken was forced to LIVE with a crisis of masculinity [24].

In addition, the findings further indicate that the film critiques patriarchal structures in commercialized and consumer-zoned ways, which complicates the film's feminist message. Overall, the study reveals that film reviews are vehicles for the broader gender discourse and one more aspect of the ongoing gender, empowering, and identity discourse in society.

5. Conclusions

In this study, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) was used to analyze the options chosen in the lexical sense in movie reviews of *Barbie* (2023) to look for ways through which gendered ideologies are reworked, outlined, or undermined by language. This research demonstrates some remarkable intuitions about the representations of empowerment, subordination, and gender stereotypes, focusing on how critics describe the characters, themes, and gender dynamics. They support the fact that the power of language can influence society's view of gender as well as ways in which the film critique can entwine itself into broader gender equality and representation discussions.

The reviews were analyzed, and it was clear how *Barbie* and Ken were talked about with regard to the gendered roles it was projecting. However, *Barbie* was promoted in empowering terms (empowered, independent, and strong), and those descriptions reflected the movie's message of feminism and the challenge to the traditional roles of a woman. On the other hand, Ken's identity was characterized by essentializing him as subordinate, dependent, and weak, as was the case with traditional gender

stereotypes of masculinity. Although both of these characters also subverted said stereotypes, *Barbie* had internal struggles with the norms of presumed femininity, and Ken's identity crisis made a commentary on the prescribed 'masculine' identity.

Also, in this study, significant attention was given to the resistance to gender norms, with many reviewers noting such a contrast to the "perfect woman" stereotype (reflected and embraced more broadly) in *Barbie*'s resistance and Ken's vulnerability. At the same time, the commercial context of the film was also recognized as a rule that prevented the realization of the utopia of feminism, underlining the gap between the ideals of feminist thinking and capitalist commercialization.

The finding of this study shows how much film criticism influences gender discourse. We explore how gender is framed and talked about in the public domain by looking at the lexical choices in reviews. Similar to the gender dynamics in the film, *Barbie* is portrayed as an empowered figure and Ken as a subordinate one in the reviews, using the language of the reviews to further bolster or subvert those power roles. Reviews that profiled *Barbie* as a strong fighter and feminist ideal were calculated, and reviews that exalted Ken as a dead end and the maintainer of the many images of men and women as unequal were included.

This study shows how, in this case, even neutral or descriptive language can present power structures that are part of the broader idea of gender norms and language. Critics' choice of terms such as empowered, supportive, weak, and submissive actually reveals their assumptions about masculinity and femininity and contributes to ongoing negotiations of those terms in popular media.

5.1. Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

However, although this study gives good insights into how gendered ideologies are reflected in film reviews, it is not without some limitations. Second, the analysis was restricted to a collection of *Barbie* reviews, in particular from mainstream and independent media, and does not represent all possible views on gender in *Barbie*. Future research might include a range of reviews from other cultural and geographical contexts or a range of different kinds of reviews to investigate how local gender norms shape film

discourse.

In addition, the main focus of this study was to review textual analysis. Future studies might conduct interviews or surveys with critics to learn more about the explanatory biases involved on a personal level or by professional experience, which may affect a critic's interpretation of films that have feminist or gender-critical elements.

Future research can also be done by looking at audience reviews and social media responses to *Barbie*. This study showed how the discourse of the film's gender dynamics is radically different on different platforms. Further research on gender equality could be done by comparing how everyday audiences interpret gender in *Barbie* with the public conception of gender equality.

5.2. Final Thoughts

Barbie (2023) is an intricate site in which not only are traditional gender roles reiterated, but feminist ideals are also examined. By using the film's language both in the film itself and after in the critical discourse, the film makes a critique of gendered expectations whilst measuring the complexities of commercialized femininity. The significance of language in defining a hegemonic mode of gendering, as well as in the representation of the body, is demonstrated by this study, supporting the way in which film criticism has developed into an extension of the discussion of gender, power, and the politics of identity as it plays out in recent media.

Ultimately, this research demonstrates the necessity for more interpretations of gender in popular media, particularly mainstream films, and the ways in which mainstream films aid—or hinder—gender norm development. The results of this study show the necessity of a further investigation of how language works in both the media text and its reviews in order to comprehend the larger social implications of gender illustration.

Author Contributions

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Institutional Review Board Statement

Ethical review and approval were waived for this study because all data were collected from publicly available sources and no human or animal subjects were directly involved.

Informed Consent Statement

Not applicable, as the study did not involve human participants directly.

Data Availability Statement

The datasets analyzed during the current study are publicly available from the specified online media and review platforms referenced in the manuscript. No new data were generated.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Appendix A

Table A1. Overview of Data Sources.

Source Type	Number of Reviews	Focus Area
Mainstream Outlets	15	Gender and Feminist Analysis
Independent Blogs	10	Gender Representation in Media
Social Media Reviews	5	Public Reception and Gender Discourse

Table A1. *Cont.*

Lexical Item	Gender Representation	Associated Theme
"Idealized"	Female	Gender Stereotype
"Supportive"	Male	Traditional Masculinity
"Independent"	Female	Empowerment
"Weak"	Male	Subordination

Table A3. Lexical Choices in Film Reviews.

Lexical Item	Gender Representation	Associated Theme
"Empowered"	Female	Empowerment
"Submissive"	Male	Subordination

Table A2. Critical Discourse Analysis Framework.

CDA Dimension	Description	Application in Study
Textual Analysis	Analyzing the linguistic features of the reviews	Focus on adjectives, nouns, pronouns, and verbs used to describe gendered characters
Discursive Practice	Examining how discourse is produced and received	Analyzing the tone, style, and critical framing of gender in reviews
Social Practice	Understanding the social and cultural context	Considering how reviews reflect or resist societal gender norms

Table A4. Lexical Choices Coding Framework.

Review Excerpt	Coded Lexical Item	Category
"Barbie is a *role model* for young girls struggling with societal norms."	role model	Empowerment
"Ken's character is *weak* and lacks the depth of Barbie's."	weak	Subordination
"The film *challenges* conventional femininity by portraying Barbie's internal conflict."	challenges	Resistance to Norms

Table A5. Coding Scheme and Examples.

Category	Description	Sample Lexical Items	Example Quote from Reviews
Empowerment	Words reflecting female autonomy or power	empowered, independent, strong	"Barbie emerges as a *strong* and *independent* figure…"
Subordination	Words reflecting male passivity or dependency	submissive, supportive, weak	"Ken is portrayed as *supportive* but often *submissive* to Barbie."
Gender Stereotypes	Traditional views of masculinity and femininity	idealized, feminine, macho	"Barbie fits the *idealized* beauty standard despite internal conflict."
Resistance to Norms	Words challenging traditional gender roles	rebel, subvert, challenge	"The film *subverts* conventional masculinity through Ken's crisis."

Table A6. Coding Procedure and Reliability.

Aspect	Details
Data Sample	30 reviews total: 15 mainstream media, 10 independent blogs, 5 social media posts
Coding Process	- Initial codebook developed from literature and pilot analysis
	- Two coders independently coded 6 reviews (20% of total)
	- Disagreements discussed and resolved to refine coding scheme
Inter-Coder Reliability	Cohen's kappa = 0.82 (substantial agreement)
Tools Used	Manual coding in Excel and NVivo (qualitative analysis software)

Table A7. Thematic Categories of Gendered Ideologies.

Theme	Description	Sample Lexical Choices
Empowerment	Words that reflect female autonomy or power	Empowered, Independent, Strong
Subordination	Words that reflect male passivity or dependency	Submissive, Supportive, Weak
Gender Norms	Traditional views of masculinity and femininity	Traditional, Stereotype, Idealized
Resistance to Norms	Words that challenge traditional gender roles	Break, Subvert, Challenge

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