
THE CULTURAL CONSTRUCTION OF BARBIE IN AMERICAN DISCOURSES: NORMAN FAIRCLOUGH'S CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

The cultural construction of Barbie in American Discourses explains how Barbie as an American popular product is seen, talked about, and understood by the public. Barbie, a fashion doll that has successfully developed into an American icon, has been a subject of discussion since its first publication in 1959. The fact that it supposedly played the role of a simple children's toy yet can capture the adults' interests shows that there is something particular in Barbie that might also be deemed relevant by the adults. Thus, this study aims to break down the structure of Barbie as an American popular product in American discourses using Norman Fairclough's theory of Critical Discourse Analysis. Using Barbie itself as the data taken from Barbie's official Instagram account, this study applies qualitative methods. The result shows that in American discourses, Barbie is seen as the face of the American Dream and a reflection of Idealized American women. Through the depiction of Barbie's appearance, the narration of Barbie's abundant leisure activities, the description of Barbie's lavish possessions, and their socialite peers, Barbie has symbolically served as an icon in the American Dream. Additionally, Barbie's position in reflecting the image of American women is seen as the idealized epitome of beauty and success. However, she is also perceived as an icon who brings mixed messages. Even though she aims to promote female empowerment, her representation is also presumed to be problematic and unrealistic.

Keywords: *American Dream; American icon; female empowerment; idealized American women*

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INTRODUCTION

In a world where virtual and online entertainment is flourishing, toys for children are also assumed to experience a decline in interest from children as the primary market target. Nowadays, children grow up with the advancement of technology, exposing them to tools such as gadgets from an early age. Compared to the older generation, a child has been familiar with gadget operation and even quite advanced at it since a very young age, unlike their parents or grandparents who started late in tech exposure.

For children, gadgets are toys and a source of entertainment. It provides many programs and applications that make them curious and excited, such as social media and online games. Most of the time, it is difficult to detach them from the thing since they are already addicted to what it is offered. As a result, children's interest in concrete toys, such as board games, action figures, and dolls, is decreasing significantly due to their higher interest in the programs on their gadgets. When the world suffered from the COVID-19 pandemic, everyone, including children, was compelled to stay home for almost two years, causing them to have less or no playdate.

In this period, the toy industry generally experienced a decrease in sales and revenue due to the COVID-19 outbreak. However, Tighe (2023) from *statista.com* reported that during the 2020-2021 pandemic, Barbie's gross sale was at their highest level ever since the last decade. This shows that many people are still interested in the doll and think that Barbie is a relevant toy, even though it can be considered old.

Launched 62 years ago, Barbie is a fashion doll manufactured by Mattel, Inc., an American toy company, since 1959. Barbie doll was created by Ruth Handler, who felt concerned with her daughter's limited choices of toys because, at that time, no toy could fulfill her daughter's imagination. According to her, most toys back then were only representative to satisfy boys' imagination, such as astronauts and firefighters. Her daughter's toys to play with were limited in occupation, such as mother or caregiver. This inspired her to create a toy showing girls they can be whatever they want (Mattel, n.d.). Eventually, Barbie became one of the world's most famous toys. Initially, it was designed for American girls in the late 50s, but now it rapidly converts teenage culture, gender roles, and consumer culture today (Uncu, 2019, p. 88). In brief, since its launching in the middle of the 20th century, Barbie's present has been accepted by American society and underwent significant increase and popularity in the global world years later, even until now.

As its popularity skyrocketed, Anindya (2013) wrote that one of the reasons it gained that much popularity across the globe was because its appearance and packaging conveyed the ideal concept of beauty at that time. There is much to say about Barbie, but its timeless and iconic fashion and beauty are always a topic of discussion. Physically, Barbie is depicted with tall, curvy, and petite body proportions. Her skin is white, and she has long, straight blonde hair.

Barbie has attracted a lot of consumers, not only Americans but multination across the globe. As a producer, Mattel produces not merely a toy but has successfully created an icon. For decades since its first production,

there has not yet been a fashion doll that can level up to the popularity of Barbie as it has become a commodity. Children and adults are attracted to Barbie dolls and consider them worth collecting. With this fact, it is agreeable to say that Barbie's success in encaptivating adults when it was purposely created for children becomes an exciting aspect of Barbie. Besides, Barbie is pictured as an adult woman, which contradicts its market target. The Barbie doll's appearance is quite mature as a children's toy.

Due to this portrayal, as much as children love Barbie's image, there has been endless criticism and hate towards the doll. Even though support and approval for the beauty are also visible, debates on the significance of the Barbie doll among adults have never stopped until today. With that being said, this research will break down the structure of Barbie in American discourse using Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis.

Fairclough (1992, p. 63) defines discourse as a mode of representation and action, describing how people act upon the world and each other. Fairclough (1992) also explained that discourse is constructed and restricted by social structure in the broadest sense and at all levels: by class and other social interactions at the societal level, by relations unique to specific institutions such as law or education, by categorization systems, by numerous norms and conventions of both discursive and non-discursive character, and so on (p. 64). Not only representing the world, but discourse is also seen as a practice that generally involves signifying, creating, and shaping the world in meaning (Fairclough, 1992, p. 64).

The first process includes text analysis (description). Text analysis (report) is a process of identifying the text to grasp the idea of how the text is presented. Fairclough also stresses the significance of investigating the process of text production, which includes the socio-cultural milieu in which the text is constructed (Fairclough, 1992, p. 97-100). The elements in this analysis are used to comprehend the text's representation, relation, and identity. In the process of analysis, Barbie itself is positioned as the text that is viewed as a cultural artifact for being one of an icon in American culture. A text is used to signify the world and consists of meanings constructing the perception of the world's reality.

METHODOLOGY

Through a qualitative method, the primary data in this research are taken from Barbie's Instagram (@barbiestyle), whose followers have reached 2.4 million by this time. Meanwhile, the secondary data are collected from library and internet sources such as essays, books, journals, and social media. Research on Barbie might have been frequently conducted. Still, observation through Barbie's social media activity is not yet found today, especially in an era where social media is used as a primary tool for engagement. Also, this research is not fixated on a particular time frame. Instead, it focuses more on seeing the structure of Barbie in American discourses, which can be seen through her Instagram updates.

DISCUSSION

Identifying discourse in Barbie as a popular product in American Culture is deemed vital because it explicates the way Barbie is seen, talked about, and understood

by the public. She has been a part of American culture since 1959, and her image has shaped the discourses around her. It consists of a broad range of conversations, debates, and opinions about Barbie in particular, and it has greatly influenced how she has been perceived while being a part of American culture for decades. Hence, this chapter examines the kind of Americanness that contributed to Barbie's production.

There are two major ideas discussed in this section. First, it breaks down several key points that cause Barbie to represent the American Dream, and second, it elaborates the reflection of Barbie as an idealized American woman and how Barbie challenges the structure of American male-dominated culture.

The Face of the American Dream

Barbie, which in its growth is eventually successfully labeled as an icon in American popular culture, is an epitome of how the ideal of the American Dream is perceived in the minds of American society. Ever since its first release and publication in 1959, Barbie has become a mainstay in American culture over the decades. Physically portrayed as an adult woman with blue eyes, blonde hair, white skin, and super slim body proportions, it does not take long for Barbie to be able to enter the market and become a symbol of beauty. Not only is her physical appearance considered captivating, but Barbie also left the world of children's toys in awe due to her fashion depiction, including outfit and accessories, that is not only considered glamorous but also luxurious as some are covered in luxury brands.

In terms of its pleasant-to-the-eye appearance and its production, Barbie is also

complemented with a set of narrations by its manufacturers to switch on Barbie's character and identity. Generally speaking, Barbie is narrated as an adult woman who has everything someone could ever ask for. A mesmerizing look is one thing, but on top of that, she also has a lot of career options. According to Mattel, Barbie's producer, over the years of her existence, Barbie has had experiences in more than 200 careers in almost every category, such as arts and media, business, education, medicine, military, politics, public service, sports, transportation, even including STEM fields.

With such a depiction as a starter, plus profound marketing strategy and media play, Barbie became increasingly popular among children and adults. Barbie successfully develops from a mere children's toy into an American icon, meaning she has occupied a certain position in American industry. Barbie is recognized as an icon and symbol that represents the American Dream in American culture. She embodies the ambivalences in consumption-oriented American society, representing what Americans most admire and dislike about themselves (Nachbar and Lause, 1992, p. 212).

Some points in Barbie solidify society's perception of the ideals of the American Dream. Those are mainly centered on the materialistic ideal of wealth and success, the ability to seize every opportunity as seen in the abundant amount of career options Barbie is described with, and the capability of living in happiness. This idea is in line with what is explicitly stated in the preamble of "The Unanimous Declaration of the thirteen United States of America" (1776), shortly known as the US Declaration of Independence. It says in the charter,

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that their Creator endows them with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. (The U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, 2023)

Barbie represents a materialistic society in which almost all activities are oriented toward fulfilling goods (Forman-Brunell, 2000). The creator, Ruth Handler, wanted to polish the doll to make it look appealing to middle-class American consumers (Tulinski, 2017, p. 11). In Handler's conception, the wide-ranging wardrobe and complete accessories would construct a different personality for each kind. Still, at the same time, the doll's fashion was assembled to satisfy the expectation of a highly consumerist American society, especially when she is vividly built as glamorous and American as possible by supporting her with high-class French designs (Tulinski, 2017, p. 11). Lord (2004) even pronounced her as sunshine, Tomorrowland, and the future made plastic (p. 43). Barbie's prosperous life emphasizes a kind of life that is precisely perceived in the American Dream. As Nachbar and Lause (1992) mentioned,

[...] she [Barbie] functions as an icon because she represents so well the widespread values of modern American society, devoting herself to pursuing happiness through leisure and material goods. [...] This is the language that Barbie speaks, [...] teaching them the skills by which their future success will be measured: purchase of the proper high-status goods, popularity with their peers, creation of the correct personal appearance, and the visible achievement of "fun" through appropriate leisure activities. (Nachbar and Lause, 1992, p. 212)

In a country where consumption is celebrated, Barbie shows her consumers to include fashion as a basic necessity. While playing with Barbie, her consumers, especially children, are taught that each distinctive outfit is required for every activity. They are supposed to appear appropriate at first glance, interchangeable, and slightly different from each other (Nachbar and Lause, 1992, p. 228). They receive certain nuances that having an extensive wardrobe allows freedom to choose the outfit of the day, and that will elevate one's value. For instance, at the end of 2022, Barbie uploaded several pictures to her 2.4 million followers on Instagram (@barbiestyle), showcasing her day outfit for different occasions.



Figure 1. Barbie poses while ice skating. [@barbiestyle]. (2022, December 2022). Grateful this isn't a video! ❄️ 📄 #BarbieOnIce #barbie #barbiestyle. Instagram. <https://www.instagram.com/p/CmbxSIGLMXb>



Figure 2. A video screenshot showing Barbie decorating her Christmas tree in pinkish accent. [@barbiestyle]. (2022, December 25). The tree is obvi pink. Happy Holidays, all! ❤️ #barbie #barbiestyle. Instagram.

The two images above were narrated in different settings and activities, yet they share a similarity in fashion. All of them are wearing blazers in different shades of pink. Through these images alone, it seems that Barbie is not just a doll with sty. Still, there is an attempt by the producer to relate the doll to the real world as near as possible by advertising it as if it is real human being than a mere lifeless doll. Nachbar and Lause (1992) also pointed out that in the real world, what is perceived as a seemingly vast array of merchandise is actually a large collection of similar products. Barbie is treated as a model that inspires and teaches its consumers about making subtle fashion distinctions resulting in an appropriate personal appearance.

Veblen (1899) criticized that “conspicuous consumption” has been practiced in America, which he referred to as an activity of buying and consuming unnecessary objects, not out of need but more as a means to show off the capability of affording the objects themselves. Veblen elaborated that the more useless the object is, the more it has the power to show the excessiveness of the wealth of its consumer, and fashion is one seasonal object that fits to represent such practice (p. 33-47). Fashion style changes quite quickly. Some might be considered out of date for the next season and disposable after a few months.

Using Veblen’s dictionary, Barbie is considered a conspicuous consumer after catching up collecting useless objects following her lavish lifestyle. Besides her immense outfit collection, Barbie also owns several groups of housings named after Dream House. On top of that, Barbie also owns several fancy cars in her garage, such

as a Ferrari, and Maserati, electric cars including its charging station, even yacht and boat. In addition to her deluxe possessions, Barbie’s pets are accessorized with pearl necklace, sunglasses, even it is designed a special place in Barbie’s boat.

Through the representation, Barbie enables families who are not privileged to own over-the-top items as such in real life to compete in the miniature (Nachbar and Lause, 1992, p. 228). Nevertheless, Barbie’s creator denies that Barbie’s life focuses merely on consumption. Handler argued that Barbie’s extravagant possessions are solely a property to get children more into play and storytelling. The situations in which Barbie doll helps children to get into is a situation that is surrounded by lavishness and rooted in consumption (p. 228-230).

Justifying one’s success is subject to how the success itself is defined. In the American Dream’s dictionary, success is basically measured by countable possession. This ethos promotes a culture that celebrates the pursuit of material wealth, and in this culture, Barbie reinforces the idea that she is successful through hard work and ambition, proven by the narration of her lifestyle and the possession of luxurious goods such as a mansion, car, and high-end clothing.

However, Mills (1951) proposed that success is no longer obtained through expert skills or hard work, instead, it is justified through how one spends leisure time and consumes products. Leisure activities and possession of luxurious objects are used to measure the status of a person in society. The significant position of leisure in defining one’s success is also emphasized by Mills (1951, p. 236), who that the “idols of work”

have been gradually replaced with “idols of leisure”. Mills explained it is not those who are frequently seen flourishing in politics or in business that are labeled as cultural heroes but those who are successful in entertainment, leisure, and consumption.

The selection of heroes for popular biographies appearing in mass magazines has shifted from business, professional, and political figures—successful in production—to those successful in entertainment, leisure, and consumption. The movie star and the baseball player have replaced the industrial magnate and the political man. Today, the displayed characteristics of popular idols “can all be integrated around the concept of the consumer” (Mills, 1951, p. 236-237).

Barbie’s life is full of all of that: entertainment, leisure, and consumption. Her 2021 Dream House, for instance, is equipped with a room to support those activities, such as a room with a DJ booth and entertainment center. Back in the 1960s, Mattel created various types of Barbie doing sports for leisure, such as skiing, skydiving, ice-skating, fishing, tennis, sailing, jogging, backpacking, gymnastics, basketball, surfing, soccer, and hockey.

Now that the era of social media is flourishing, Barbie’s daily activities are displayed online through her social media account, such as Instagram (@barbiestyle), which was first opened in 2014. Following her Instagram updates, Barbie is seen to conduct several activities for her leisure, which are allegedly not a kind of doable activity on people. Barbie’s leisure activities are exclusive and not relatable to many. Only some people who are privileged with time and money can keep up with it. Her

Instagram posts revealed she likes to pamper herself with beauty treatment, does yoga or cardio every morning, and spends more time with her pet dog after work. She also described that she loves traveling to different places a lot. On top of that, even when Barbie is seen doing low-maintenance activities, her appearance has never been low-maintenance at all. She is always dolled up as a person of high status with branded clothes. Overall, she has done almost every kind of activity.

Additionally, Mills (1951) also wrote that the most potentially successful people are not those with high grades but people with good personalities (p. 186). Nachbar and Lause 1992 wrote that personality and the ability to expand friendships and get along with peers would help one succeed. A pleasant smile, well-groomed appearance, self-control, and conformity replaced honesty, integrity, and hard work as means to success in business and personal life (p. 232). In other words, on top of wealth, another benchmark of success is visible through one’s peers and social skills.

In this aspect, Barbie is also perceived to have achieved another success as she is presented to be surrounded by plentiful friends, and some of them manage to have their own edition in Barbie’s world to be Barbie’s peers. Not only friends, but Barbie also has a longtime so-called boyfriend named Ken, who becomes the second most important character in Barbie’s world after Barbie itself. Like Barbie, Ken is portrayed as a sort of rich boyfriend with a fashionable clothing line and accessories.

Pertaining to this circumstance, peers are usable as a benchmark for success as they function as a way of showing popularity or a

place to seek approval. Then, it serves an important position in the eyes of the American Dream. Having more friends in the group might prove one's popularity and personality, contributing to the construction of success. Besides, Riesman (1989) described that "people and friendships are viewed as the greatest of all consumables; the peer group is itself a main object of consumption, its own main competition in taste" (p. 81). In accordance with Riesman, it can be abridged in a nutshell that peers are the primary influencers for consumption, as their acceptance is considered significant.

Through her Instagram account, Barbie also posted several pictures which showed her hanging out with some of her peers. They are seen engaging in activities such as New Year's Eve, picnics, pajama parties, traveling, holidays, and fashion events. Each doll is styled differently, and they are all for sale. As Nachbar and Lause (1992) stated, portraying Barbie and their friends inspires children to collect friends or get themselves an entire peer group (p. 233).

As an iconic representation of the aspirational qualities associated with the ideals of the American Dream, Barbie serves as a role model and source of inspiration for children, or probably even reaching society in general, and shows them what the American Dream looks like. The representation of the American Dream reflected in Barbie cultivates and promotes the culture of optimism that resonates in many Americans' hearts, including children and adults alike, without exceptions. Through the depiction of Barbie's appearance, the narration of Barbie's abundant leisure activities, the description of Barbie's lavish possessions, and their socialite peers, Barbie

has symbolically served as an icon in the American Dream for setting the standard of success as seen through wealth, leisure, object consumption, and peers.

The Reflection of Idealized American Women

Barbie has been a staple in American popular culture for decades since it successfully entered the toy market back in the 60s. In its development, Barbie became a doll that has been a favorite and popular among children. Only one word captured their consistent interest in Barbie: beautiful. For these innocent children, Barbie is simply beautiful. She is well-groomed and stylish. She has a perfect body, skin, and hair. She is everything the children perceive as beautiful. Even though many other aspects of Barbie make her popular, it is agreed that her beautiful appearance is the ultimate hook since Barbie has become an iconic figure in American culture and has significantly influenced how American women perceive their beauty and femininity.

As a symbol of American femininity, Barbie has embodied various trends and ideals of womanhood throughout the decades, reflecting America's constantly fluctuating social and cultural norms. During the first decade, Barbie was modeled after the classic American beauty with blonde hair, blue eyes, and super thin body dimensions. Around the 1960s and early 1970s, Barbie focused on following fashion trends and movements at the moment, as shown by her stylishly tailored clothing and accessories. Following the era, Barbie became more career-oriented, with dolls representing various occupations, such as doctors, businesswomen, dentists, teachers, and nurses.

However, in the early stages of its publication, Barbie's physical appearance received backlash from some parties, including the mothers. They argue that Barbie's physique, including its breasts, in adult women's form, is horrifying. It imposes a particular sexual image that mothers are afraid would spark a negative influence on their children. Barbie was released in 1959, a post-World War II era, where marriage and motherhood were deemed the peak devotion girls could do in their lives (Gerber, 2009, p. 7). Thus, baby dolls were more common in that era.

Contradictorily, the little girls are fond of Barbie's groundbreaking appearance because it looks like nothing they have ever seen. They are brainwashed by Barbie's beauty, sexiness, and glamorous appearance, which turn out to be the features they want to grow up with. While some mothers argue that Barbie's sexual appearance could harm the little girls, others think that her look could be inspirational and useful. A mother of an eight-year-old girl changed her mind after her daughter gave her testimony on how well-groomed Barbie is (Lord, 2004, p. 40). She was convinced that Barbie would model her daughter to becoming a "poised little lady" instead of a messy, possibly boyish look (p. 40). According to Lord (2004), though unspoken loudly, deep down, the mom admitted that Barbie reminded them of what was better than the worse: "Better her daughter should appeal in a sleazy way to a man than be unable to attract one at all" (p. 40).

Therefore, instead of only pointing out its sexual implication, Barbie could inspire girls to look well-groomed and pretty. Nevertheless, the main goal is that the girls

could attract men to look more desirable when they grow up. Hence, they can marry and start their motherhood rather soon. Motherhood is perceived as the sole purpose of girls after they enter the ready-to-marry age. Regardless of the mothers' hidden motives in allowing Barbie dolls at home, Barbie's alluring portrayal with a slim and toned figure, symmetrical face, white and clear skin, perfect teeth, shiny hair, large bust, tiny waist, long and lean legs, has been embedded in the minds of the girls that that is what beauty looks like. Rogers (1999) described her physique as modern middle-class femininity (p. 11).

Adorable; billowy, breathtaking; charming, chic; dazzling, delicate, dramatic; elegant and exquisite; fanciful, fashionable, and fetching; glamorous and glittering; graceful; lovely; radiant, regal, romantic; shimmering, sparkling, stunning. [...] Barbie is an icon of the femininity associated with the middle reaches of contemporary Western societies. (Rogers, 1999, p. 11)

Since Barbie was introduced to the public, children's orientation in terms of appearance has referred to the doll. Getting used to looking at such a flawless image of a woman as a reference from an early age, children, perhaps silently or loudly, want to copy and paste Barbie's image for herself from her looks and actions. Consequently, children grow up with the ultra-feminine image of women in their minds (Uncu, 2019, p. 87). As time passes, Barbie's physical representation develops a certain ideal in society's perception in general, not only exclusive to children.

The beauty ideal absorbed from Barbie's representation is purposely constructed by Mattel as the producer. Tulinski (2017, p. 1)

mentioned that Barbie's creator expected the doll to carry the legacy as the idealized figure of a woman for the upcoming eras. Asselanis (1996) also suggested that the seriousness and professionalism behind the making of Barbie aside from producing high-quality products is also to enable little girls to project their future dreams. Ruth Handler, Barbie's founder, wanted to help the girl's dream through Barbie because she foresaw that Barbie could model the supposedly ideal American girl (Tulinski. 2017, p. 11).

However, Barbie's appearance has never stopped receiving criticism since day one. Specifically in terms of body proportion, studies found that her body proportions are "unrealistic, unattainable, and unhealthy" (Dittmar, Halliwell, and Ive, 2006, p. 284). Norton, Olds, Olive, and Danks (1996) compared Barbie's body proportion with adult women's body dimensions using anthropometry (a branch of study in anthropology). The result found that only 1:100,000 women might have a similar body proportion as the doll (Norton, Olds, Olive, and Danks, 1996). Rintala & Mustajoki (1992) also noted that if Barbie were a real woman, a human being, her body would not have the capability to menstruate because her body fat percentage does not reach the minimum requirement per medical assessment as her weight is also way too low in number (p. 1575-1576).

Barbie's influence in constructing body image in children's minds is salient, knowing how they look up to the doll as a model and aspiration. The beauty ideal Barbie brings is internalized gradually through fantasy and play while using the doll as an imaginary companion (Dittmar, Halliwell, and Ive, 2006, p. 284-285). According to Dittmar

(1992), a doll such as Barbie also functions as a socialization agent whose qualities are desired and eventually idealized.

[...] young children initially imitate, and identify with, "beautiful" Barbie in a direct, nonreflexive manner but then, gradually, come to internalize thinness as a salient feature of what it means to be beautiful. (Dittmar, Halliwell, and Ive, 2006, p. 285)

For young girls, the beauty ideal exemplified by the doll becomes an essential standard that they conceptualize for themselves, regardless of whether or not it is achieved or whether they have changed their minds when they reach a more mature age. Nevertheless, children growing up having such thoughts internalized in their minds was part of the "consequences of exposure to Barbie doll stimuli" (Dittmar, Halliwell, and Ive, 2006, p. 285). The problem is that the thought might jeopardize children's expectations of the reality of their body proportion or what society expects towards their body proportion, especially when they have become fully grown women. Children do not know what is "normal" and what should be "normalized" yet. They have been unable to see things through and would most likely see things as they are.

In such a condition, Barbie is situated as a parameter of whether or not a girl would be satisfied or dissatisfied with their appearance. Barbie is alleged to psychologically impact girls as it triggers dissatisfaction with their body proportions. Dittmar, Halliwell, and Ive (2006) found that Barbie causes more body dissatisfaction in girls than other dolls with an average American woman's body dimension.

These ultrathin images not only lowered young girls' body esteem but also decreased their satisfaction with their actual body size, making them desire a thinner body. (Dittmar, Halliwell, and Ive, 2006, p. 290)

Jayanti & Adi (2020) also suggested that the framing of American women's ideal body comprises a thin and youthful appearance. According to Jayanti & Adi, thin women are depicted more positively in the media or advertisements, and youthful appearance makes women more visible, causing them to fear looking old as it can deprive them of vital resources (p. 151-154). Gracia-Arnaiz (2010) pointed out that thin bodies have the implications of "good health, self-discipline, and social distinction" (p. 221). On the contrary, fat bodies are often associated with illness, considered undesirable, and have a negative image in society (Jayanti & Adi, 2020, p. 151).

The implications and results of the beauty standard perceived through the Barbie doll are possibly detrimental for those who cannot conform to the ideal. Being so entrenched in Barbie's world, one might see it as their reality. As a result, it might jeopardize them because it consistently makes them feel bad about themselves if the expectation fails to succeed. There have been some cases where some people underwent a series of plastic surgery here and there their body to change their appearance close to Barbie, who later claimed themselves "human Barbie" or "real-life Barbie", or at least used Barbie as their plastic surgery reference. People such as Rachel Evans (@rachel_evans_bikin on Instagram), Jessy Bunny (@jessy.bunny.official on Instagram), and Dalia Naeem (@dalia_naim1 on Instagram) are only a few people who

publicly announced their surgeries are influenced by Barbie. They are willing to spend thousands of dollars for the process as they consider the splurge their way of expressing themselves and pursuing happiness. One of the women, Rachel, confessed that becoming Barbie allows her to be happy inside out, especially when she struggled with identity when she was younger.

There is no judgment in what these women did with their bodies, as it is up to their preference. However, this proves that even if a natural way of looking like Barbie is not deemed possible, an instant way of "becoming Barbie" using the method of plastic surgery is also barely possible for most people as it costs a lot of money. As much as her portrayal is celebrated and considered inspirational in representing idealized American womanhood, Barbie's representation is a headache for bringing unrealistic beauty ideals to society.

In conceptualizing an idealized image of an American woman through Barbie, there is more to discuss than just its American femininity symbol. Not only her appearance but Barbie is also embraced for challenging male-dominated culture in America. Her representation is praised as it awakens women's sense of empowerment and freedom, particularly by depicting her diverse careers and interests. The narration of her successful career history is considered subverting traditional gender roles and stereotypes as it challenges the dominant narratives about women amid American male-dominated culture, especially when Barbie was introduced in an era where the knowledge of women's role was greatly

emphasized in domestic role only. As mentioned by Forman-Brunell in her essay,

When the teenage Barbie doll debuted in 1959, she was a rebel among her contemporaries. Baby dolls had socialized "baby boomers" to assume maternal and domestic roles consistent with the dominant postwar gender ideology, devised as a buttress against unsettling change. (Forman-Brunell, 2000)

The workforce is not very common for women in Barbie's early publication era; hence, her career representation is seen as an agent of change that is a meaningful icon for women. Nevertheless, decades have passed, yet the perception of women's innate domestic role remains glued on them. This causes Barbie's female empowerment representation to stay relevant in supporting the movement, especially regarding her diverse career representation in almost every work field, which is often considered to be exclusive for men, or in other words, male-dominated fields, such as construction worker, pilot, astronaut, police officer, police commissioner, bank governor, president, and so on. As a result, Barbie is seen as a breakthrough and positive influence for the girls by exemplifying that she is empowered and more than capable of making her dream come true. She conveys that women are not inferior, that being a woman does not instantly make her less worthy, and that a woman is not in any way less capable than men, as capability is not defined by sex and gender.

The formation of her character and identity is not inadvertently made up. The philosophy conveyed through the doll that girls can be anything and are rich in choices is already in the mind of the creator, Ruth

Handler, ever since she had planned to create the doll. This is the exact reason why Barbie's tagline says, "You can be anything", which highlights the non-existence of borders and limitations in what girls want to achieve, which shows that she is capable of becoming who or what she wants to be, and shows that she is responsible for her, and she defines herself.

Barbie's representation not only encourages women to break the boundaries but also enables them to have a bigger picture of various occupations that girls do not know in advance. Barbie's diverse career allows girls to discover that certain branches of work exist and that women can take part, too. Therefore, nominating Barbie as an influencer still makes sense, as she was initially created for that. Barbie allows children, especially girls, to have as broad an imagination as possible while role-playing or storytelling using the dolls. Thus, it also helps them to dream of what they want their future to be like. This is explicitly seen through the way Barbie is advertised on the online platform, in which the producer mentioned that "We Are Barbie! Kids can play out stories from the ordinary to the extraordinary because when a girl plays with Barbie, she imagines everything she can become!" (Mattel, 2020), or what Mattel loudly said in the website "imagining she can be anything is just the beginning. seeing that she can make all the difference". Here, not only do the producers employ Barbie as a message conveyor, but they want the children to be Barbie herself.

Barbie's consistent movement in challenging the male-dominated culture in America through career representation expresses Mattel's serious intention to

empower women through the doll. By showing their encouragement, it is expected that girls eventually feel encouraged enough to get away from the social structure that incarcerates their entire womanhood instead of giving them freedom for their future. This is why Barbie is perceived as the epitome of the ideal American woman. Barbie is depicted as that one girl who has the courage to break free from the binding social rules and subvert the dominant narratives of being a woman. Barbie is empowered.

However, despite its positive mission, Barbie allegedly presents a mixed message. She wore a silver and glittery fuchsia pink space suit with puffy sleeves as an astronaut. She wore a toska mini dress with a headcover and face mask in the same color when she was a surgeon, not forgetting a pair of white high heels for the shoes. As a police officer, she let her long, wavy blonde hair loose in a half-up, half-down hairstyle, showing off her gold earrings. She wore a mini white dress, a white handbag in silver metal, pointy blue heels, and brought a small mirror when she became a dentist. She may be depicted as a professional, but her representation focuses on appearance and glamorizes the job more than realistically portrays women's challenges in the field. Nachbar and Lause (1992) suggest that despite trying different high-status occupations, her appearance does not suggest competence and professionalism (p. 230).

Rogers (1999, p. 14) conveyed that regardless of Barbie's pervasive presence, she cannot become a part of ordinary lives in a full sense due to her fantastic femininity. Rogers argued that this goes way beyond what Connell (1987) referred to as "emphasized femininity", the kind of

femininity that is "performed especially to men", such as "the display of sociability rather than technical competence, compliance with men's ego in an office relationship, acceptance of marriage and childcare as a response to labor market discrimination against women" (p. 187-188). In other words, "femininity organized as an adaptation to men's power, and emphasizing compliance, nurturance and empathy as womanly virtues" (Connell, 1987, p. 188).

Rogers used the term "emphatic femininity" to describe Barbie's demeanor. It refers to an extreme scale of feminine appearances and demeanor (Rogers, 1999, p. 14). According to Rogers, Barbie has never looked masculine, even as a police officer (p. 14). Police Officer Barbie indeed wore a police uniform, which surprisingly was not colored pink. Still, her hairstyle and the incompleteness of police officer's materials, such as guns and handcuffs, diminished her masculinity.

Barbie thus feminizes, even maternalizes, law enforcement. More generally, nothing about her appearance ever looks androgynous or gender-neutral even when she is being athletic. (Rogers, 1999, p. 14-15)

Additionally, the exaggerated display of Barbie's ultra femininity in its representation allegedly reinforced traditional gender roles that portray women as passive and decorative objects rather than active agents in their lives. There is a concern that Barbie's highlight on beauty and fashion can overshadow the message of female empowerment conveyed through her diverse range of careers and interests. The emphasis and focus on fashion are feared to perpetuate the misogynistic idea of women, in which physical appearance is

considered the primary value and priority for women rather than abilities, skills, talents, and accomplishments.

Barbie's portrayal of "emphasized femininity" is situated in appearance and her demeanor, which often sparks a particular sense of a penultimate nice girl with no negative attitude. As Rogers (1999) mentioned,

Femininity entails not only an appropriate appearance but also a proper demeanor centered on being nice—soft-spoken, polite, helpful, and sensitive. Nice girls like Barbie are neither combative nor strident; they are neither loud nor critical; they are good-mannered and respectable. (Rogers, 1999, p. 15)

Nevertheless, Barbie's femininity is questioned when she is never seen to have a wedding or build a family, let alone give birth. Barbie per se is the center of Barbie's world, without needing to make a self-sacrifice or put down her dreams for the sake of marriage and motherhood (Rogers, 1999, p. 16). She is indeed narrated to have a long-life boyfriend, Ken, and many friends whom she calls family, but that is it. It never escalated to a point where she was married or built her own family. Barbie's femininity is then perceived as inconsistent and/or ambiguous (p. 16).

While reflecting the idealized image of American women, the value frequently debated in the discourse is how femininity is perceived and treated. Even though Barbie's hyper-femininity representation is underlined, femininity itself is not a stumbling block in challenging male-dominated culture in America. It does not require women to reject the naturalness of their femininity or

particularly adopt traditionally masculine traits. Rather, it should have created a more inclusive and egalitarian society where women can be valued and respected for who they are, regardless of gender. Thus, it is extremely possible for women to be both feminine and powerful, and challenging male-dominated culture does not mean forbidding them completely to embrace their femininity or rejecting masculinity.

Through its career representations, Barbie is seen to cross what is presumed as women's boundaries countless times by working in a male-dominated profession. She is also consistently seen to never fully try to eliminate her distinctive femininity through her appearance despite doing masculine work. Rogers (1999, p. 17) saw this as an attempt made by the iconic doll to allow women to exhibit all of their traditional signs of femininity, including each and every nice demeanor, while smoothly succeeding in male-dominated professions. Barbie implies that women can succeed in masculine domains while remaining steadfastly feminine (Rogers, 1999, p. 17).

From another point of view, idealizing the image of an American woman as a figure who has the ability to balance multiple roles, such as being a successful professional and a devoted mother, would raise society's expectation for the emergence of "superwomen", which requires women to excel in every aspect of their life. The thing is that, regardless of the progressive movement in giving women freedom and power at work, women are still held accountable for domestic roles at home. As a result, women are doing double jobs as breadwinners and housewives. Zavella (1987) found that women engaged in employment

still feel that household work remains their primary responsibility even though they have expected their husbands and children to help with the housework. As a result, women's ambivalence towards the condition might also emerge, leading them to feel imprisoned rather than liberated.

Overall, Barbie's position in reflecting the idealized image of American women is very complex and multifaceted. While Barbie is seen as the ideal epitome of American women in beauty and success, she is also perceived as an icon who brings mixed messages. Even though she has the role of promoting female empowerment, her representation is also presumed to be problematic and unrealistic.

CONCLUSION

Through the depiction of Barbie's appearance, the narration of Barbie's abundant leisure activities, the description of Barbie's lavish possessions, and their socialite peers, Barbie has symbolically served as an icon in the American Dream for setting the standard of success as seen through wealth, leisure, object consumption, and peers. In reflecting the idealized image of American women, Barbie is believed to have constructed a particular benchmark of how women should act and appear. Barbie becomes an ideal role model in accordance with how she is depicted. Nevertheless, Barbie's position is very complex and multifaceted. While Barbie is seen as the ideal epitome of American women in beauty and success, she is also perceived as an icon who brings mixed messages.

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