

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the background of the research, research question, objective of the research, scope of the research, and significance of the research.

1.1 Background of the Research

The Barbie doll is a toy that brings back the memories for some people especially for the girls (R. H. Susanti, 2021). Mattel is one a company from America, a company that produced the Barbie doll since 1959. Ruth Handler as a founder of Mattel created the Barbie doll out of the concern for her daughter's because there were limited toys for her daughter, and the market can't fulfill her daughter imagination. According to Ruth Handle, most of the toys back then were only meant to fulfill the boy's imagination, like astronauts and firefighter. Her daughter was played the limited doll such as a mother and caregiver. In addition, Mattel also expanded its company to produce the movies related about Barbie. Mattel first launched Barbie films in 2001 with CGI animation and adopted fairy tales. When Barbie launched, Barbie became an icon of toxic femininity that was opposed by feminists.

Barbie is becoming a fashion doll that has become an American icon because its popularity, it caused the conversation since its debut in 1959 where the 2nd feminism wave happened. The fact that is supposedly played the role of a simple children's toy while capturing the attention of adults suggest that there is something unique about Barbie that adults may find relevant. The stereotypically barbie in the market has created the negative impact because it has unrealistic representation of female appearance and the toxic beauty standards (Rahmat & Tambunan, 2020).

Barbie represents traditional gender roles, such as heterosexual norms, consumerist values which women should do. The traditional gender roles in this context arises the patriarchy society. The Barbie represents the role of women that always smiling, dressed well, good looking, slim and always came with the unrealistic body (Toffoletti, 2007). According to Tyson (2006), the traditional gender roles have been represented the men as the rational one, strong, protective,

important and women as a sentimental/emotional one, weak, the one always mothering and obedient. Because of this thing, Barbie doll always represented as an irrationality and physicality, as opposed to culture, reason and thought, their role is hardly recognised as a human subject. This situation caused gender inequality.

Other criticisms have arisen about Barbie, according to Bhadania (2021) the existences of barbie doll made the ethnicity and gender, resulting in a cultural symbol of racism and sexism. Barbie dolls create the ethnicity and gender, creating a cultural symbol of racism and sexism. Since the first debut of Barbie, the girls have faced the cruel reality of the American class system that Barbie has made. Barbie's appearance feminizes and embodies this iconic doll, sending and making the message of ideal femininity through her perfect hair, shapely legs, flawless breasts and none of the Barbie doll is gender neutral. That's why Barbie is a sexist portrayal of women. The Barbie originally represented only one race as the first time Barbie launched it was a white Barbie who wearing a swimsuit with blonde hair, which had a negative impact on its buyers, while the Barbie was marketed worldwide, so it did not represent diversity.

As the statements above the researcher can conclude that Barbie is a symbol of sexism, traditional gender roles where patriarchy comes from, gender inequality and only represent a race. Apart from the Barbie doll, Mattel wider their wings to make a movie about Barbie. Barbie's first animated movie entitled "Barbie in The Nutcracker" was first released in 2001 under the Barbie Entertainment line. Barbie's first website, Barbie.com, was also launched. In 2023, Warner Bros launched a movie called "Barbie the Movie". In this movie, Barbie no longer represents only a race, sexism, traditional gender roles and gender inequality because Greta Gerwig as the director of the Barbie movie released in 2023 has broken this assumption. In her movie, she represents Barbie as a part of society. Barbie is portrayed as diverse as through ethnic diversity, body shape, jobs, got the same opportunity like men, etc. In this case, Greta Gerwig broke the feminist stereotype that Barbie is a bad role model for women. Equality, diversity and acceptance of all body types are on display in this movie. All of which supports Barbie manufacturer Mattel's claim of

creating the doll as a "role model" for the advancement of women in a changing the world.

Greta Gerwig has made movies that contain moral messages such as Snow white, 20th Century Women, Lady Bird, Little Women, Barbie and many more. Some of her movies contain messages of feminism, one of which is the movie she directed last year called Barbie. In the movie, Margot Robbie plays the role of Stereotypical Barbie. This movie represents feminism side especially liberal feminism which has portrayed in Barbie the movie where there is a president Barbie in the movie and the Barbies as women are portrayed in the utopian world of Barbieland where women have full rights, not bound by the institution of marriage and traditional gender roles also all the Barbie character shows that they have their own autonomy to decided what they want to be and free from any oppressions which it is in line with liberal feminism movement.

The researcher of this research wants to analyze Barbie the movie because there are no researchers who have examined liberal feminism before with the object of research of the Barbie film directed by Greta Grewig also because the movie was viral in 2023. A lot of people was talking about Barbie the Movie because *Barbenheimer*, an internet phenomenon and internet meme that rose to fame ahead of the release of two films that are completely opposite in theme, background and genre: Barbie and Oppenheimer, on 19 July 2023 in Indonesia, and 21 July 2023 in the United States and Canada.

According to Haradhan (2022), feminism is a movement that led by women of all backgrounds to end oppression by men in the patriarchal societies. It constantly fighting against all the form of oppression of women. It produces that attempts to comprehend and conceptualize gender roles while advocating for the conclusion of women's interest in social organizations.

The importance of feminism in today's society is important. Although as most people know, the struggle for women's equality with men has started long ago, in reality there is still a patriarchal culture that imprisons women. This imprisonment is built by the prisons rooted in society as well as the minds of women themselves who consider themselves not free because they are familiar with the discrimination

caused by this culture. The importance of learning about feminism reflects the aspiration to create a just, equal and inclusive society for all individuals, regardless of their gender.

One of the branches of feminism is liberal feminism. According to Tong (2017) on her book *Feminist Thought: A More Comprehensive Introduction* stated that liberal feminism is an ideology or a belief that fighting to release women from traditional gender roles which made the oppression for the women. Liberal feminists advocate for changes in laws and policies to ensure women have the same rights and opportunities as men, including in education, employment, and political participation. The movie "Barbie" embodies this ideology by portraying a utopian world where women can pursue any career and lifestyle they choose, free from societal constraints. This representation is in line with the liberal feminist vision of a society where gender does not dictate women's potential or opportunities, highlighting the belief that systemic change is possible through progressive reform and individual empowerment.

A discussion about the social issue in the Barbie the Movie was chosen for this study because this time the feminism issue is something that must be taken seriously, one of the feminism issues was liberal feminism, which became the main topic of this study using Barthes' theory of semiotics and the liberal feminism framework from Tong & Botts (2017).

The researches about feminism and semiotic theory by Barthes has been conducted by several researchers, like by Harinanda (2021), Arifin (2021), Aryawan (2021), Rosyidah (2022), Gonza (2022), Syafitri (2022), Susanti (2022), Putri (2022), Mellinia & Sary (2022), Natasya (2022), Rachman (2022), Sormin (2022), Hutaaruk (2023) and Putri (2023). Those researches above focus on the representation of feminism in the movie by using Roland Barthes theory. Another researchers conducted several researches about semiotics too but they are focused on the advertisement as an object of the research and not related to the feminism, those are Rahmat (2020), Basit (2020), Heryandi (2023) and Yasa (2023). The researches of feminism has taken by another researcher too but in the research, the object is a music video, those are Poetiray (2021) and Isabel (2022), most of their

research about breaking the societal stereotype that women are weak, unreliable, frivolous and unable to stand up for themselves.

Researches on liberal feminism with a movie as a object has been conducted by several researchers like Pangestuti (2021), Andrianto (2022), Putri (2023), Salamah (2023) and Sofia (2024), most of their researches about the discrimination in society, discrimination in education, discrimination in the employment/workplace, discrimination in politics and illustrates liberal feminism by confronting stereotypes of women.

Based on previous studies, the researcher of this study used the semiotic theory of Roland Barthes. The difference between this research and previous research was that this study focused on Barbie's character from the movie titled "Barbie," released in 2023, as the object of the research, which illustrated liberal feminism using Roland Barthes' semiotic theory, besides that this research was conducted because no researcher has examined the Barbie movie released in 2023.

This research deeply adopts Barthes' semiotic theory to analyze Barbie's character from a liberal feminist perspective from Tong (2017). The choice of this theory is based on the suitability and specificity of its components, making it easier to research the aspects of liberal feminism in Barbie's characterization.

1.2 Research Question

According to the background, the research question is as a follow.

1. How is liberal feminism portrayed in the Barbie characters in the movie?

1.3 Objective of the Research

The following is the objective of the research, which is in line with the research question indicated above.

1. To identify how Barbie's character represents the liberal feminism in Barbie the Movie.

1.4 Scope of The Research

The scope of the research it to analyse the scenes then took the image/screenshots in a movie that showed the liberal feminism movement and

semiotics analysis will be the key topic for this study, with the researcher focusing on characters of Barbie and how Barbie represents liberal feminism movement. To analyse the character, the theory of semiotics offered by Barthes (1994) on the images/screenshots from the scenes showing liberal feminism movement from Tong (2017) framework used as the study framework to answer the question.

1.5 Significant of Research

The result of this study is expected to give benefits to both theoretical and practical contributions.

a. Theoretically

This research is expected to explain liberal feminism in depth and details, as well as raise awareness about its positive impact on social life. Theoretically, this study will be able to provide empirical data on the gender and language sectors, specifically on Barthes (1994) semiotics concept with Tong's liberal feminism framework. The goal of this study is to analyze liberal feminism study and its connection to Barbie movie. As a result, the focus of this research is on the characters of Barbie that portrayed the liberal feminism movement in a movie according to semiotics theory by Barthes (1994) with Tong's liberal feminism framework through the images/screenshots that the writer took from the movie.

b. Practically

The results of this study will be useful to academics who explore and value the phenomenon of movie development as a topic of cultural discourse, semiotics, liberal feminism and modern media art. For the students, this research written in English can improve reading and comprehension skills of academic texts in English and reading and studying this thesis can improve students' critical and analytical thinking skills, especially in assessing gender representations in popular media. For the teacher, this research can be a teaching material to introduce the concept of feminism especially liberal feminism and gender analysis in English classes or popular culture studies in media. For the implications of English language teaching, this research enables the development of relevant and interesting teaching materials by integrating gender studies and language learning. Students can enrich their

specialised vocabulary and text analysis ability, and develop academic writing and argumentation skills. Through mini research projects and class discussions, students can also improve their speaking and critical thinking skills. This research is also designed to raise the awareness and increase bigger change in the society regarding how society views toward liberal feminism and gender roles. As a result, this study can be used as a foundation for future research and discussion on the subject of liberal feminism and how to handle it.