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Analysis

Popular misogyny/backlash on fundamentally feminist media amplifies the ongoing attacks on women and has become a concerning trend that highlights the intersection of misogyny, online harassment, and the dynamics of digital communication. Barbie the Movie is a prime example in how backlash as well as forms of popular misogyny from male critics has been reflected throughout social media and has become quite widespread. With this being said, Piers Morgan, Ben Shapiro, and Jo Koy have all contributed to misogynistic understandings of women through their negative comments/speech acts toward the Barbie Movie. Moreover, their segments on Barbie the Movie can be understood as reinforcements to popular misogynistic representations, creating an emphasis to analyze further. Though I am contributing to feminist scholarship toward Barbie The Movie, it is important I emphasize that this does not in any means signify complete support of the blockbuster film. Barbie The Movie has its flaws and I understand how some feminist scholars may be opposed to it in some ways because of this. My goal throughout this analysis is to showcase the epidemic of popular misogyny within feminist oriented films as well as feminist spaces, and Barbie The Movie has had its fair share from male critics.

Through my analysis of Jo Koy, Ben Shapiro, and Piers Morgan, I will be answering the following research questions: firstly, how might “anti-male” sentiments from male critics of the Barbie movie reinforce negative perceptions of feminism as a whole, and how does this then contribute to an understanding of hegemonic masculinity within our society? Secondly, in looking at the backlash from the Barbie movie through a feminist lens, how might popular misogyny from male critics impose misogynistic understandings of women’s bodies and personhood? These questions will highlight the ways in which their segments function through certain ideological spaces, especially that of misogynistic and/or feminist spaces. Through a feminist critique of the segments from Jo Koy, Piers Morgan, and Ben Shapiro, I aim to uncover how they operate within popular misogyny and what this then insinuates to their target audiences/the general public. I argue that these segments heavily reinforce negative perceptions of women and operate within popular misogynistic ideological apparatuses, targeting women, and contributing to the normalization of misogynistic attitudes and behaviors on social media, overall. To this point, I will be categorizing my analysis by my research objects; I will first analyze Ben Shapiro’s segment and its relationship to misogyny and hegemonic masculinity. Then, I move toward Piers Morgan who reflects similar thoughts and feelings to that of Ben Shapiro, reinforcing hegemonic masculinity, misogyny and sexual objectification. Lastly, I focus on Jo Koy’s segment in how it showcases sexual objectification, as well as the different ideological spaces functioning within the Golden Globes.

Ben Shapiro

Throughout the segments from Jo Koy, Ben Shapiro, and Piers Morgan, reflections of misogynistic understandings of women are made apparent; misogyny, the deep-seated prejudice

and contempt towards women, has played a significant role within the backlash/negativity toward Barbie The Movie. Ben Shapiro, in particular, was especially contemptuous against the

Barbie Movie. In Shapiro's youtube video, we are

automatically submerged into his distaste of the film through his title, “Ben Shapiro

DESTROYS The Barbie Movie For 43

Minutes”, as well as through the beginning clips

; Shapiro first shares his opinion on the film

through visuals of him throwing Barbie dolls

into a trashcan and lighting them on fire (see

figure 1). He states through these visuals as well

as linguistically within the first couple minutes

of his Youtube video that he despises Barbie the

movie. He describes, “let me begin with my

generalized assessment of the movie, this movie

is not just a piece of shit, this movie is a flaming

piece of dog shit, piled atop an entire dumpster

on fire, piled atop a landfill filled with dog shit.

It is one of the worst movies I've ever seen”

(Shapiro). For the next 40 minutes of his video,

Shapiro is describing scenes throughout Barbie The Movie and relaying his opinions on them.

Throughout this YouTube video, what is most important are the reasons for his contempt for the film. Shapiro described profusely how Barbie the movie is a bad film due to it

Figure 1



contextualizing and representing women's struggles. Shapiro describes, “in the beginning, the monologue, you have Helen Mirren saying ‘because Barbie can be anything, women can be anything at least that's what the barbies think, see in the real world, women can't be anything’ and that's one of the messages within the film. In the real world men pretty much run everything which is weird, who greenlit this piece of shit” (Shapiro 7:23). This reflects not only contempt for the content of the film, but also contempt for women and their struggles. Throughout his video, we are submerged into Shapiro’s contempt, as well as the lack of regard he has toward the feminist efforts of the film. He shares, “the basic premise of the film politically speaking is that men and women are on two sides of divide and they hate each other and literally the only way you can have a happy world is if the women ignore the men and the men ignore the women. That seems to be the final outcome of this film” (Shapiro 3:25). In addition to this, Shapiro either argues that a lot of the struggles reflected in the film simply aren’t true or diminishes the struggles showcased within the film; more specifically, as he’s describing certain scenes throughout the movie, he is also utilizing certain verbiage/language that instills this message. Shapiro describes, “... immediately upon arriving in the real world, Barbie is hit with an overwhelming tsunami of sexism like right away, boom. She walks in and a bunch of men just leer at her and say ‘give us a smile Blondie’ which is something that no one under the age of 70 has said to a woman in the recent past. Give us a smile Blondie, seriously?” (Shapiro 12:37). As he says this, it is shown how he diminishes or completely disregards these issues women often face; issues women, in fact, face on a day-to-day basis.

Shapiro is actively dismissing sexually objectifying language throughout his segment, reflecting an ideological culture where violence against women is trivialized and excused. His linguistic choices showcase a normalization of misogynistic attitudes and behaviors which

reinforces misogyny throughout our society. He continues to say, “we get Barbie explaining that all the men who are leering at her and gazing at her, they have an undertone of violence. She's threatened, she's physically threatened because this is the real world, the real world is not like Barbieland. In the real world, all women are victims, they are deep and abiding victims of the system, as well learn by the use of the word patriarchy no less than ten times in the film”

(Shapiro 12:56). Without watching the segment, this may seem like he is acknowledging the feminist efforts of the film but this is not the case; throughout Shapiro's video, he makes many mockery comments about women struggling so much. Ben Shapiro is creating this narrative that displays the struggles women face within Barbie the Movie as irrelevant, and unimportant, reinforcing misogynistic ideologies of women. Despite there being much more to unpack within Shapiro's YouTube video, I want to end by touching base on his comments toward one of the most popular scenes within the Barbie Movie. The scene in reference here is the one from America Ferrera as she's describing women's struggles of never being able to live up to the societal standards, regardless of all that you may contribute. In response to this, Shapiro says,

“...oh my God it's so difficult to be a woman so the same tired truesitic bullsh*t that they've been propagating in every new wave feminist film for the last 45 years in the United States is now is now essentially telescoped into this one speech from America Pharaoh including a few cutaway shots of Margot Robbie looking up adoringly in America for and she explains that it's super hard to be a woman. It's so damn difficult to be a woman, you know why because of the patriarchy, because of the men that's the actual story of the film” (Shapiro 25:24).

Ben Shapiro is once again diminishing women's struggles as well as the feminist efforts of conveying these struggles within the film. Through a linguistic choice of “same tried, and truestic bullsh*t”, as well as the mockery we’ve seen all throughout his video when explaining the difficulties of being a woman, it is clear how Ben Shapiro’s segment linguistically reflects ideologies surrounding that of hegemonic masculinity, sexual objectification, and misogyny. This holds true within Piers Morgan’s segment as he had expressed a similar sentiment to that of Ben Shapiro.

Piers Morgan

Similar to that of Ben Shapiro, Piers Morgan immediately calls attention to his opinions on Barbie The Movie through the title, “‘Why does empowering women have to be about trashing men?’: Piers Morgan on Barbie”. This anti-male sentiment continues throughout the entirety of his talk show along with various other opinions he has. Piers Morgan reinforces this notion further, “... however, all the male characters in Barbie world are simply called Ken, so it's pretty clear where this movie is going, this is an assault on not just Ken but all men” (Morgan 1:23). Anti-male sentiments on feminist-focused films like Barbie the Movie reflects a hierarchy of male issues and women’s, with male issues taking higher priority. This, then, contributes to an understanding of hegemonic masculinity and misogynistic ideologies in how it diminishes the feminist efforts of the film and dismisses the struggles women face. Morgan emphasizes further, “Well I wasn't wrong and it's even worse than I feared, the core focus of Barbie is, oh god, the patriarchy. The word is used



endlessly in the movie even though most people, including me actually, have no real idea what patriarchy really means. I guess it means all men are evil so they can prove otherwise. Women are their (men) oppressed victims, anyone who disagrees is obviously a misogynist” (Morgan 1:35). This consistent normalization and/or dismissal of the patriarchy and its effect on women invokes an ideological space where hegemonic masculinity, misogyny, and sexual objectification are reinforced.

Piers Morgan and Ben Shapiro are very similar in their hatred for how the Barbie movie contextualizes women's struggles. In describing the plot of the Barbie movie; Morgan exclaims, “... Barbie and Ken are transported to the real world where, wait for it, men are in charge of everything and are largely despicable. Barbies immediately objectified, one ghastly man shouts ‘give us a smile Blondie’, which is a phrase that hasn't actually been used in the real real world since probably the second world war” (Morgan 2:45). This same scene was described in Ben Shapiro’s segment and both him and Piers Morgan came to the conclusion that this experience is irrelevant, furthering my argument on these male critics reflecting misogyny. Piers Morgan proceeds to share, “When I hear the word patriarchy as often as it's said in this movie, immediately I'm like here we go again, here we go again. This sort of construct that despite everything that's happened in the last fifty years, all men are awful till they prove otherwise... right I mean it just is exhausting to me” (Morgan 5:15). The specific verbiage/language used throughout the majority of his segment suggests a misogynistic/contemptuous outlook on women; Morgan’s lack of regard and dismissal for the issues showcased within The Barbie Movie reflect the presence of popular misogyny. Piers Morgan recites this sentiment multiple times throughout his segment; Morgan says, “It seems to me what the movie really wants to do is just replace the patriarchy with the matriarchy, in other words, go from one thing which

apparently every woman believes is the problem with the world, and flip it round so that the people who suffer the problem and the oppression and made to look like downtrend imbeciles are men, not women. I don't really get that, why is it so awful, this patriarchy syndrome” (Morgan 6:49). This verbiage of ‘I don't understand why it's so bad’ was not only one of the purposes of the barbie movie but it also showcases a contempt for the issues women face. Gerwigs intentions



of the film were to highlight these issues and bring more awareness to that which seems to be unclear with Morgan. Piers Morgan has set up his segment to include the following guest stars: Pictured to the left is a

screenshot from Piers Morgan's segment including a female guest star who supports the Barbie movie; it is also one of many moments throughout the segment where Piers Morgan aims to justify issues women face. (7:55). At this moment, heated debates on patriarchy, capitalism, and sexism are depicted, and quite frankly, Piers Morgan's rebuttal to it all is 'do you think this only happens to women' or 'do you think women don't do this' and says this multiple times throughout this video. His linguistic choices aim to undermine that of his guest's argument and often interrupts her to do so, establishing a certain dominance within the segment while reinforcing hegemonic masculinity. He then ends his video with what seems to be sarcasm; Piers Morgan mockingly concludes, "lovely woman (Margot Robbie), very talented, couldn't be happier that a woman is making hundreds of millions of dollars out of her looks and her talent in the patriarchy, what a miracle. How's she doing it? It's really it's like incredible some woman is able to do that and break through this towering sexist Mayhem which inhibits all women I know

including these two downtrodden, oppressed, female creatures in front of me who I know just never feel they could even speak unless I let them right ladies?” (21:15). Piers Morgan’s segment heavily reflects hegemonic masculinity and misogyny through his dialogue as he repeatedly disregarded/dismissed the issues presented in the film, mocked the argument surrounding the impact of the patriarchy, and made rebuttals regarding these impacts.

Jo Koy

Lastly, though shorter, Jo Koy’s segment has sparked a lot of controversy from the 2024 Golden Globes. Within this segment, Jo Koy is making numerous jokes regarding the nominated films, directors, etc. In doing so, Jo Koy makes a couple jokes reflecting the sexual objectification of women. Jo Koy jokingly says, “*Oppenheimer* and *Barbie* are competing for cinematic box office achievement. *Oppenheimer* is based on a 721-page Pulitzer Prize-winning book about the Manhattan Project, and *Barbie* is on a plastic doll with big boobies. I watched *Barbie*, I loved it. The key moment in *Barbie* is when she goes from perfect beauty to bad breath, cellulite, and flat feet. Or what casting directors call character actor” (Jo Koy 2:34). Throughout all three segments, it is obvious the point of the movie went right over their heads. In Koy’s case, he is deducing *Barbie* down to only her body parts, and though this may have been the point of all the *Barbie* movies prior, it certainly was not the point of *Barbie the Movie*. Pictured above is

a screenshot from the night of the Golden Globes; within this picture, you can see Selena Gomez, as well as others, put their palms to their face. What we are witnessing here are two ideological



spaces clashing with one another, popular feminism and popular misogyny. After these jokes were made, a lot of people were not amused by the jokes that followed; for example, after this joke had been made, Koy jokingly pokes fun at Ryan Gosling. Koy jokes, “I really did love it. I don't want you guys to think I'm a creep but it was kind of weird being attracted to a plastic doll. It's something about your eyes, Ryan. Margot, it's not always about you” (Koy 2:55). More importantly, after reciting this joke we are panned over to Ryan Gosling's reaction to it which, as you can see to the left, is not a good one. A live critique of Jo Koy's segment is transpiring to



which he then notices this, and defensively says, “Yo, I got this gig ten days ago, you want a perfect monologue? Yo shut up, you're kidding me, right?” (Joy Koy 3:37). We once again are brought back to a live critique from the audience of the specific verbiage/language used throughout Koy's segment. Jo Koy, jokingly or not, reflects how male critics exacerbate the objectification and sexualization of

women by creating a platform for the dissemination of misogynistic content. Women's bodies and appearances are often scrutinized, judged, and commodified by male critics, contributing to a culture of popular misogyny, sexism and objectification that reinforces harmful gender stereotypes and undermines women's autonomy and dignity. Jo Koy contributes to an understanding of the normalization of even “comical” forms of sexual objectification, reinforcing an understanding of it within society.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be deduced how the segments from Jo Koy, Piers Morgan, and Ben Shapiro reinforce certain ideologies like that of hegemonic masculinity, sexual objectification, and misogyny. This is made incredibly apparent in how they discuss the Barbie Movie, as we've seen throughout this analysis; the specific language/verbiage as well as the visuals used throughout all of their segments contribute to popular misogyny by their means to diminish the feminist intentions of the film. Though the cases Piers Morgan, Ben Shapiro, and Jo Koy are significant, popular misogyny on feminist-focused films are incredibly prevalent and occur frequently across social media platforms. The anonymity and accessibility of social media emboldens male critics to engage in harmful behavior they might not express in face-to-face interactions. Women, especially those in positions of influence or visibility, often bear the brunt of these attacks but in the case of Barbie the movie, we have observed attacks on feminist-focused films.

Popular misogyny manifested through the backlash and criticism Barbie the Movie has received solely because of its feminist themes or female-centric narratives. Despite Gerwig's intent to challenge gender norms and promote women's empowerment, Barbie the Movie has frequently faced scrutiny, dismissal, and even hostility from mainstream audiences and male critics. Barbie the Movie has been labeled as "too political" or "preachy," dismissing the messages about gender equality and social justice. Moreover, since the premier of Barbie the movie, Greta Gerwig has encountered systemic barriers and discrimination in the male-dominated film industry, further complicating the production and reception of feminist films. Ben Shapiro has been a big contributor to this scrutiny of Gerwig and vocalized this

various times throughout his segment. Addressing popular misogyny requires ongoing efforts to challenge harmful beliefs, promote gender equality, and empower women to assert their rights and dignity. In analyzing the popular misogyny that has emerged from Barbie The Movie, I have engaged with feminist discourses surrounding that of misogyny, hegemonic masculinity, and sexual objectification. As previously stated, though Barbie the Movie has its flaws, it has sparked important conversations about gender inequality and inspiring viewers to become advocates for gender justice. Additionally, it serves as an amazing representation of how popular misogyny operates within our current society. Ultimately, the dismantling of popular misogyny throughout feminist-focused films paves the way for a more inclusive, equitable, and empathetic society.

