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### **Context Paper**

My chosen research objects of segments from Jo Koy, Ben Shapiro, and Piers Morgan concerning the Barbie Movie offer critical insight into the functionality of hegemonic masculinity, misogyny, and sexual objectification within our society. The specific verbiage/language used within their segments acts as a reproduction of these theoretical frameworks, inherently reinforcing misogyny, sexual objectification, and hegemonic masculinity through their respective platforms of YouTube, the news, social media, or a combination of these. In working through the Communication Studies discipline, we can see how the segments from Jo Koy, Ben Shapiro, and Piers Morgan contribute toward rhetorical studies due to my methodology of critiquing their verbiage/language and the certain discourses being reinforced through it (hegemonic masculinity, sexual objectification, and misogyny). Furthermore, these research objects I have chosen to contribute to discourses that directly affect women, and, more specifically, female celebrities, and feminist scholars, with its significance due to the discrimination we face on a day-to-day basis. In describing my research objects and their importance within my selection of theoretical frameworks, I will first provide a background on the Barbie Movie as a mode of contextualization. I then transition into Greta Gerwig's specific

intentions with writing and directing the film to provide a foreground for my argument. Lastly, I navigate through my selection of segments from Ben Shapiro, Jo Koy, and Piers Morgan about the backlash of the Barbie movie.

Greta Gerwig's extremely pink fantasy-comedy, "Barbie", premiered in theaters on July 21, 2023. As of January 10, 2024, it has made over 636 million dollars at the North American box office, bringing in a total of 1.45 billion dollars globally. Barbie The Movie became the biggest female-directed film premiere ever and eventually became the highest-grossing film directed entirely by a woman after staying at the top of the box office for four weekends in a row. Now, it ranks as the 15th largest worldwide and 14th largest domestic release in history. With this milestone, "Barbie" quickly surpassed multiple blockbuster films including 2011's "Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part 2" and now takes the title for Warner's highest-grossing worldwide release with this achievement. In addition to this, Barbie became the studio's biggest domestic title in 100 years, and surpassed yet another blockbuster film, "The Dark Knight", by \$536 million. This high gross of the Barbie movie can be accounted for by the great reviews it received and the originality of the film; as Brody categorizes it, "Brilliant, Beautiful, and Fun as Hell" (2023). He then proceeds within his article, "...Gerwig's movie puts in bright critical light the trouble with Barbie's pure, blank perfection. Instead of projecting their own imperfections or thoughts onto the doll, girls have been socialized to strive for an impossible doll-like perfection in their own lives" (Brody 2023). For some, Barbie the movie is seen as a cinematic masterpiece, enlightening its audience on real-world implications the patriarchy has on society, and the everlasting battle individuals have on their image and sense of belonging because of it. Greta

Gerwig takes a similar stance in recognizing the Barbie film as one to help bring *all* individuals together, and to help shed light on issues women might be faced with at some point in their lives.

In an interview with Gerwig, she explains her intentions in writing and directing the Barbie movie; she explains, “Barbie as an idea, as a brand, had this mission statement of inspiring girls to be whatever they wanted to be as adult women, and then I think it's very important to have an adult woman talk about all of the kind of impossible contradictions.” (Gerwig 2023). This movie has proven to be very complex in how Gerwig engulfed Barbie into the multiplicities of womanhood within a patriarchy; Stereotypical Barbie was coming from a land in which all the Barbies managed their society through the positions they held, making all of the Barbies the leaders within Barbieland. With this matriarchy, the Kens of Barbieland had no intrinsic purpose; in fact, oftentimes when Barbies were happy, Kens were happy, and that was the most individualism we got from Kens. As Barbie starts to experience odd transformations (flat feet, cellulite, etc.), she sets out on an adventure to figure out what is happening. When Stereotypical Barbie embarks on her journey with Ken to the real world, she soon realizes how cruel this real world is. Another one of Gerwig's intentions for Barbie The Movie was to challenge her audience with these complex ideas of our patriarchy by subjecting even the most “perfect” doll to its demise, as well as showcase the ways in which we might begin to accept the parts we have been influenced to dislike. Gerwig describes this further,

“I want the movie to make people feel somewhat relieved of the tightrope. We ask ourselves — not just as women, men too — that we walk this impossible tightrope of being perfect,” Gerwig says. “Barbie has always been a symbol of this thing that you

could never reach because she physically couldn't stand up if she were a human being. So I wanted it to almost invert that formula and find a way that it gave you permission to just be yourself and know that that's enough.

Gerwig's intentions of relieving men and women's tension on the tightrope through her film, *Barbie The Movie*, reflect a want to transgress from the societal norms that have been programmed into us. This tightrope can be defined as a "double bind women find themselves in"; within the Barbie movie, the scene with Barbie Gloria speaks volumes in contextualizing this and offers concrete examples of the "tightrope" women must walk on. Gloria says, "You have to be thin, but not too thin. And you can never say you want to be thin. You have to say you want to be healthy, but also you have to be thin. You have to have money, but you can't ask for money because that's crass..." (*Barbie Movie* 2023). Gerwig hoped that this display of what women and men must go through might challenge the audience to "step off the tightrope" (Gerwig 2023). Regardless of Greta Gerwig's hopes, this sentiment of the Barbie movie challenging its audience was not shared by everyone.

Since its July theatrical release, the very pink blockbuster has been quietly shattering expectations, as well as sparking mass controversy. Despite its gross of \$162 million, many people have come out to say that, to put simply, *Barbie The Movie* isn't very good, didn't live up to its potential/didn't serve a particular purpose, or that it's just a man-hating movie that just so happens to have dolls with big breasts. The backlash the Barbie movie has received ranges from a variety of viewpoints and takes form on multiple social media platforms including that of YouTube, TikTok, news platforms, and more. From my research thus far, there seems to be a pattern of *who* is contributing the most to the backlash of the Barbie movie; in collecting content

from reviews of the Barbie movie, there is a trend of men posting and commenting the most in opposition to the Barbie movie. With this in mind, I will be focusing on segments from Jo Koy, Piers Morgan, and Ben Shapiro in which they all seemed to either show some distaste for the Barbie movie or perceived the movie differently, whether it was through comedy or not. Moreover, these individuals have spoken up on their stance on the Barbie movie, and it provides an interesting object for analysis.

Joseph Glenn Herbert (Jo Koy) is an Asian-American stand-up comedian/actor and bases a lot of his content on his family, and especially on his son. Per Jo Koy's website, he started his career in comedy at a Las Vegas coffee shop where he would perform standup; since then, he has broken a variety of records and his comedy career is thriving. One record, in particular, was for "the most tickets sold by a single artist at 23,000 tickets and 11 sold-out shows at The Neal S. Blaisdell Concert Hall in Honolulu" (Jo Koy Website). Holding this record then led to him having a day dedicated to him in Honolulu; "Jo Koy Day" is now November 24th! Due to Jo Koy's high success, he's also had many other records broken ranging from attendance records to having the most sell-outs, and was even awarded "Stand-Up Comedian Of The Year" in 2018 at the Just For Laughs Comedy Festival in Montreal. Unfortunately, Jo Koy's most recent show did not have the same turn-out as those prior.

Jo Koy's segment during the 2024 Golden Globes sparked a lot of controversy; in particular, his segment on the Barbie movie and Oppenheimer was especially controversial. The 2024 Golden Globes took place on January 7, 2024, and the comedian Jo Koy was impromptly chosen to host the award show. The comedian, Jo Koy, made a comparison between the Barbie movie and Oppenheimer which goes as follows, "*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). After he recited this “joke” to the audience, it was obvious to Jo Koy it had fallen flat to which he then defensively said, “Yo, I got this gig ten days ago, you want a perfect monologue? Yo shut up, you're kidding me, right?” (Joy Koy). He then proceeded to say, “...and then right after that, watch *Barbie*, and then you're gonna be like somethings missing. Then watch *Maestro* and you'll be like oh there it is, it's on Bradley Cooper's face” (Jo Koy). Throughout his segment, Jo Koy made numerous inappropriate jokes that did not pan well with the audience, most of which pertained to his comments regarding the *Barbie* movie. Jo Koy's segment has been of particular interest throughout social media since the 2024 Golden Globes was aired. In addition to this segment, we have seen numerous other forms of backlash regarding the *Barbie* movie including but not limited to “anti-male” sentiments, and an overall reinforcement of hegemonic masculinity. In particular, Piers Morgan had a lot to say about the *Barbie* movie, describing it as an “assault on men” and “anti-male.”

Piers Morgan is a 58 year old, British man who has lived his life so far through his career as a journalist, media figure, and television personality. Throughout his years, he has accumulated a variety of achievements; in 1989, Piers Morgan was hired as the show-business editor at *The Sun*. This position sparked the movement of Morgan’s career into journaling and allowed him to grow his public profile due to the position's celebrity networking opportunities. Piers Morgan had opportunities to interact with celebrities and take pictures with them, fully

allowing him to advance in his career. Just five years after his hiring at *The Sun*, Piers Morgan was appointed as editor-in-chief of *News of the World*, making him the youngest national newspaper editor at 28 since 1937. In more recent times, Piers Morgan has appeared in many television shows and movies including but not limited to America's Got Talent, Britain's Got Talent, The Apprentice, Entourage, The Campaign, and, ironically enough, Snowden. Despite Piers Morgan's successes, he's also been involved in numerous scandals throughout his career, as well as criticized for his seemingly "brash" style within his work.

During his time as editor at the Daily Mirror, Piers Morgan was caught in a scandal in 2004 regarding photographs falsely portraying British soldiers mistreating prisoners; after these photos had indeed been proven false, Morgan was fired. Piers Morgan has also never exactly respected privacy; Piers Morgan is now under fire for yet another scandal during his time as an editor at the Daily Mirror. As of December 2023, though insisting he was never aware, Piers Morgan has been found guilty of contributing or being knowledgeable to phone hacking, and illegal-information collection during his time at the Daily Mirror. These incidents do not even breach the surface of the complexities that are Piers Morgan. In addition, Piers Morgan routinely discusses his controversial opinions on his show, "Piers Morgan Uncensored"; for the sake of my topic, I narrowed down to one of his videos regarding his opinions on the Barbie Movie.

Throughout the video, Piers Morgan describes his distaste for the Barbie movie; within the first two minutes of his video, he's proclaiming the Barbie movie as an "assault on men"; Morgan describes 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 2023). He then proceeds to say, "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 2023). Piers Morgan then describes the plot of the Barbie movie; through his description, 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 2023). At around five minutes in, Piers Morgan introduces his guest stars Chris Taylor, Ashley Rose Blakely, and Esther Cracker.

After all his guest stars have been introduced, Morgan takes another moment to essentially showcase his dislike of the patriarchy and what that means; he says, “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 2023). Going on the topic of the patriarchy further, Piers 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 2023). Fast forward to around 13 minutes, and we are now getting into an argumentative debate between Piers Morgan and the two other guest stars, Chris

Taylor and Ashley Rose Blakely. For the next 7 minutes, we are watching heated debates on patriarchy, capitalism, and sexism, and quite frankly, Piers Morgan's rebuttal to it all is 'do you think this only happens to women' and says this multiple times throughout this video. He then ends his video with what seems to be sarcasm; Piers Morgan concludes with, "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?" (2023). This similar sentiment is also shared with that of Ben Shapiro in his forty-three-minute-long video on the Barbie movie.

Ben Shapiro is an interesting character, to say the least. Shapiro is most famously known for his controversial opinions, his position as editor-in-chief at The Daily Wire, and "The Ben Shapiro Show", a conservative podcast show. One of his most recent works is a rap song by Tom MacDonald featuring Ben Shapiro called "Facts"; this rap song was released five days ago so it's incredibly new. To say the lyrics within the rap song are mind-boggling would be an understatement, as it is so much more than that. Right off the bat, their first lyric is "They call me offensive, controversial. There's only two genders, boys and girls" and it only goes down from here (MacDonald and Shapiro 2024). To put their music more into perspective, the next several lyrics go as follows, "They think that I'm racist, yeah right. I'm not ashamed because I'm white, if every Caucasian's a bigot, I guess every Muslims a terrorist, every liberal is right" (Macdonald 2024). Up until a minute and eight seconds, we see only Tom Macdonald, and then Ben Shapiro

comes out saying, "...let's look at the stats, I've got the facts, my money like Lizzo, my pockets are fat" (Shapiro 2024). Essentially, they're rapping about how they don't care if they offend anyone with their controversial opinions which especially rings true for Shapiro given his line of work; in fact, "the song's name is drawn from Shapiro's catchphrase, 'facts don't care about feelings,' one that he frequently uses to argue ideas that mainstream listeners might find offensive" (Scribner and Branigin 2024). Ben Shapiro prides himself on being a controversial figure within the media, and will take on any feat to make sure his point is made known; in this case, I will be describing his video on all the controversial opinions he has on the Barbie Movie. Ben Shapiro starts by introducing his opinion on the Barbie movie with visuals; within the first minute of his YouTube video, we see Shapiro throwing Barbie dolls into a trashcan and lighting them on fire. Shapiro then begins his assessment of the Barbie movie by saying, "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" (2023). Shapiro then proceeds to say, "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" (2023). Then, Shapiro goes more in-depth with the Barbie Movie by starting to give his insights from the beginning of the movie, as well as describing what's happening in the beginning scenes; he 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” (2023). After taking care of the beginning of the movie, he continues to describe what's happening in the Barbie Movie; now focusing on when Barbie and Ken adventure into the real world, Shapiro claims “it’s just a complete mess” in regards to everything else that happens in the movie. In particular, Ben Shapiro seems to be especially upset about one of the first scenes of Ken and Barbie making it to the real world; he 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 2023). He then 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 2023).

Unfortunately, this was only the first 15 minutes of his 43-minute video but an overall gist can be formed; Ben Shapiro hates the Barbie movie.

Some observations I have made upon doing more research on my objects is that first and foremost, a lot of the backlash from the Barbie movie can be accounted for by white men, with Jo Koy as one of the few exceptions to this. In addition to this, I have noticed a very common trend of the men partaking in the Barbie backlash being incredibly upset about the idea that Barbie has experienced so much sexism and violence upon getting to the real world. It’s almost as if they think women experiencing sexual violence and harassment aren’t high. That being said,

there are a lot of men upset about the overall content of the movie and its arguments of patriarchy, hegemonic masculinity, etc.

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