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My analysis of segments from Jo Koy, Ben Shapiro, and Piers Morgan concerning *Barbie* offers critical insight into the functionality of hegemonic masculinity, misogyny, and sexual objectification within our society. The specific language used within their segments reinforce 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 language and the certain discourses being reinforced through it (hegemonic masculinity, sexual objectification, and misogyny), which directly affect women, and, more specifically, female celebrities, and feminist scholars, with the discrimination we face on a day-to-day basis. In describing my research object, I will first provide a background on *Barbie* 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 that show the

backlash to *Barbie*.

Greta Gerwig's 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 (source). *Barbie* 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 (source). Now, it ranks as the 15th largest worldwide and 14th largest domestic release in history (source). 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 (source). 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 (source).

This high gross of *Barbie* can be accounted for by the great reviews it received and the originality of the film; as Brody categorizes it, the movie is "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* is seen as a cinematic masterpiece, enlightening its audience on real-world implications the patriarchy has on society, and the everlasting battle females have on their image and sense of belonging because of it. Greta Gerwig takes a similar stance in recognizing *Barbie* 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 *Barbie*: “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 her film, *Barbie*, into the multiplicities of womanhood within a patriarchy. Stereotypical Barbie comes from a fantasy 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 in the reality outside this world. When Stereotypical Barbie embarks on her journey with Ken to what we would recognize as the real world, she soon realizes how cruel this real world is.

Another one of Gerwig's intentions for *Barbie* was to challenge her audience with these complex ideas of our patriarchy by subjecting even the most “perfect” doll to its demise within it, 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 (source).

Gerwig's intentions of relieving men and women's tension on the tightrope through her film, *Barbie*, reflect a desire 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” (source).

Within *Barbie*, 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* 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 *Barbie* 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* 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 *Barbie* 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 *Barbie*. More

specifically, in collecting content from reviews of *Barbie*, there is a trend of men posting and commenting the most in opposition to *Barbie*. 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 *Barbie* or perceived the movie differently than it was intended, whether it was through comedy or not. Moreover, these individuals have spoken up on their stance on *Barbie*, and it provides an interesting object for analysis. [the several next paragraphs I plan to cut down as well as insert context on popular misogyny]

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; in Hawaii, November 24th is now "Jo Koy Day." 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 success as those prior.

Jo Koy's segment during the 2024 Golden Globes sparked a lot of controversy; in particular, his segment on *Barbie* and *Oppenheimer* was especially controversial. The 2024 Golden Globes took place on January 7, 2024, and the comedian Jo Koy was chosen to host the award show. Jo Koy made a comparison between *Barbie* 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. 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?” (Jo Koy). He then proceeded to say, “...and then right after that, watch *Barbie*, and then you're gonna be like, ‘something’s 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 play well with the audience, most of which pertained to his comments regarding *Barbie*. 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 *Barbie* 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 *Barbie*, 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 in media, 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 journalism 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 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 *Barbie*. Throughout the video, Piers Morgan describes his distaste for *Barbie*; within the first two minutes of his video, he's proclaiming *Barbie* 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's) oppressed victims, anyone who disagrees is obviously a misogynist” (Morgan 2023). Piers Morgan then describes the plot of *Barbie*. 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 movie's use of the word 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. 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 when he says, "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 *Barbie*. 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. 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 downhill 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. Indeed, "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). All of this is to say that 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. even speak unless I let them, right ladies?" (2023).

In this case, I will be describing his video on all the controversial opinions he has on *Barbie*. Ben Shapiro starts by introducing his opinion on *Barbie* 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 *Barbie* 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 a 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 *Barbie* by starting to give his insights from the beginning of the movie, as well as describing what's happening in the beginning scenes. He says, “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 *Barbie*, 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 says, “... 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 we’ll 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 *Barbie*.

Some observations I have made upon doing more research on my research object is

that first and foremost, a lot of the backlash from *Barbie* can be accounted for by men. I have noticed a very common trend of men partaking in the popular misogyny of *Barbie* and 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, when it is. [insert google reviews of the movie to showcase this]. 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, making this analysis all the more necessary.

Misogyny, hegemonic masculinity, and the sexual objectification of women are incredibly prevalent within our society. Though we have grown in areas involving the workforce, opportunities for women, and more, there is still much work to do. At the forefront of my argument here lies my motivation for the analysis of segments from Jo Koy, Piers Morgan, and Ben Shapiro. These three men have all actively exhibited, in one way or through multiple, hegemonic masculinity, misogyny, and/or the sexual objectification of women through their backlash to *Barbie: The Movie*. These acts of backlash emphasize the need for more discourse surrounding these issues. In analyzing these segments through a feminist critique, I aim to answer the following questions: firstly, how might charges that the movie is "anti-male" reinforce negative perceptions of feminism as a whole, and how does analyzing such then contribute to an understanding of hegemonic masculinity within our society? Secondly, how might expressions of popular misogyny from male critics impose misogynistic understandings of women's bodies and personhood more generally?

These research questions effectively pertain to my project due to wanting to analyze the implicit or explicit reflections my selection of segments have within the theoretical

frameworks of hegemonic masculinity, misogyny, and sexual objectification. Furthermore, the examples I have chosen contribute to discourses that directly affect women, and, more specifically, female celebrities and feminist scholars, reinforcing the discrimination we face on a day-to-day basis. Women are constantly scrutinized for either being too sexual, or for simply not living up to a standard society has constructed for us, and this is a standard that both men *and* women continue to pressure other women into maintaining. Through this paper, my research questions will serve as guidance to perform a literature review of the following theoretical frameworks: hegemonic masculinity, sexual objectification, and misogyny.

Hegemonic Masculinity

In fully understanding hegemonic masculinity, we must first break-down and define hegemony. Hegemony is a term coined by Antonio Gramsci in which, “Gramsci called such subtle forms of domination “hegemony” and believed that a “counter-hegemonic struggle” had to be initiated to challenge the ruling class” (Lahiry 177). Through the research I have done thus far, I have found many scholars like Donna Przybylowicz defining the notion of hegemony as, “the dominant organizing and signifying practices of all parts of society, which produce subjects and their ‘lived relations’ in such a manner as to seem natural, coherent, nonconflictual, and uncontentious” (274). To put simply, hegemony can be understood as the foundation in which hierarchical ideologies are formed; in particular, how race, class, and gendered or other ideological hierarchies are perpetuated through the notion of hegemony (Przybylowicz 260). More specifically,

Hegemonic ideologies (for example, patriarchal practices that are often so difficult to describe because their hegemonic range is so great) hide their own contradictions by suppressing counterideologies that challenge their domination--they attempt to appear

universal and natural, yet they almost entirely efface their own historical construction.

Przybylowicz 274.

A crucial aspect of Gramsci's model of hegemony is that hegemony must be continually maintained through an ideological process whereby those dominated by hegemony consent to their own domination because it has been so thoroughly naturalized into the "common sense" of the culture. Certain hierarchies have been constructed throughout hundreds of years and have essentially produced dominant ideologies as well as non-dominant ideologies, as we cannot have dominance without there also being a clear line distinguishing a non-dominant counterpart. Through this interpretation of hegemony, we can understand hegemonic masculinity as a gendered hierarchy with male domination as a priority and women's non-domination as the outcome of such, creating an oppressive relationship between man and woman.

Hegemonic masculinity has been consistently established by scholars like Alparslan Nas, Donna Przybylowicz, and Mike Donaldson as a symbiotic, social relationship between gender structures and society. Furthermore, it can be attested that hegemonic masculinity functions under a binary of individuals either being the oppressor or the oppressed, in this case man and woman. As described by Donaldson, "Hegemonic masculinity is 'a question of how particular groups of men inhabit positions of power and wealth, and how they legitimate and reproduce the social relationships that generate their dominance'" (655). Through this understanding, multiple results of hegemonic masculinity arise; via hegemonic masculinity, the majority of men gain advantages from exerting authority over women, and for some it results in dominance over other men, as well.

In relation to the segments I have selected for analysis, hegemonic masculinity operates

within my project in the way it's been defined above: as a mode of male dominance that frames anything that threatens or deviates from that dominance as absurd or ridiculous without every needing to explain that within a counter-dominant framework, the thing they critique makes sense. In an analysis of the rhetoric of Ben Shapiro, Jo Koy, and Piers Morgan, the concept of hegemonic masculinity is pertinent in understanding the impact of the language they used within their segments on *Barbie*. All three individuals come from a place of benefitting from hegemonic masculinity and it is apparent through the specific language used within their segments. This can be best understood through Donaldson's interpretation of hegemonic masculinity; he writes, "The public face of hegemonic masculinity, the argument goes, is not necessarily even what powerful men are, but is what sustains their power, and is what large numbers of men are motivated to support because it benefits them" (646). With this in mind, it is clear how power dynamics emerge implicitly from the notion of hegemonic masculinity.

Misogyny

Hegemonic masculinity is also important because it enables other forms of women subjugation like misogyny. Misogyny refers to the deep-seated hatred, prejudice, or contempt towards women or girls. This conception of misogyny rang true up until more recently as, in academic discussions during the 1980s, the term misogyny was employed to analyze clerical writings and encompassed expressions of direct animosity towards women as they were first being incorporated into traditionally male spaces as a consequence of second-wave feminist activism (Rieder 3). The scholar Kate Manne, took this conceptualization of misogyny and branched it out even further, encapsulating it as a political phenomenon that reinforces the subordination of women to men. Her argument on misogyny indicates, "a political

phenomenon whose purpose is to police and enforce women's subordination and to uphold male dominance" (Manne 33). Furthermore, she "...characterizes misogyny as a property of social environments where women who are perceived as violating patriarchal norms are met with hostile reactions. This hostility 'keeps women down' and systematically stifles their efforts to exit their subordinate position" (Lopes 2-3). Manne's stance on misogyny departs from the generalized perception of "individual hatred or hostility towards any and every woman, or women in general, simply because they are women," and shows how it is a structural effect of patriarchy (Díaz and Valji 38). Manne's scholarship on misogyny provides a fundamental understanding of the concept, making her scholarship a crucial part of my literature review, and my overall analysis.

Sarah Benet-Weiser takes a similar approach within her book, *Empowered*. Benet-Weiser states in her preface, "I also feel strongly that it is important to challenge the typical journalistic move that treats misogynistic acts as individual anomalies. In this book, I approach popular misogyny as a structural force" (Benet-Weiser xi). This understanding of misogyny is particularly useful for my project in how it emphasizes the need for a critique of the individuals (Piers Morgan, Ben Shapiro, and Jo Koy) who have reflected misogyny through the language used within their segments to show the structures that make their misogyny legible to audiences who share their positionality. [insert more supporting discourse].

Misogyny often emerges from ingrained societal attitudes, cultural norms, and historical power dynamics that reinforce the idea of women being inferior to men, and it can have pervasive and harmful effects on individuals and society as a whole. Misogyny can manifest in various forms, including verbal abuse, discrimination, belittlement, violence, or systemic oppression based on gender. As described by Buiten,

“Misogyny refers to a strong prejudice against women, but can broadly denote a discourse or ideology that legitimises and maintains women's subordination. While the parameters of misogynistic behaviour can be contested and range from overt to subtle acts, misogyny is linked to the ways in which masculine identities are shaped and the ways in which these identities are asserted through power”

Sexual Objectification

Transitioning from misogyny to sexual objectification, we traverse a continuum of dehumanizing attitudes and behaviors towards women, reflecting a broader spectrum of gender-based discrimination and objectification. Sexual objectification involves the degradation of an individual down to purely sexual purposes/means, a concept very prevalent within feminist scholarship. Through the research I have done, there seems to be somewhat of a divide on who sexual objectification pertains to, as well as if it is inherently harmful. Scholars like Martha Nussbaum have suggested that there is not a specific gender subjugated to the “objectified” and the “objectifier” as any gender can experience sexual objectification (Scott 193). On the other hand, scholars like Catharine MacKinnon and Sally Haslanger have argued that, “in the background is a theory of gender as constituted by hierarchical social relations: men are, constitutionally, objectifiers, and women are, constitutionally, objectified (Haslanger 2012: 56; MacKinnon 1987)” (Stock 192). Though there may not be designated genders for the objectified and objectifier within sexual objectification in my personal opinion, my argument for my analysis is on the basis of women being the ones experiencing sexual objectification while male critics are the ones perpetuating that notion further through their backlash against *Barbie*.

In addition to this, there have also been disputes on whether or not sexual

objectification is always harmful. Nussbaum, for example, has criticized other scholars for suggesting that sexual objectification is inherently harmful to those experiencing it. In her words,

“...it isn’t necessarily harmful - or more strictly speaking, not all forms of objectification are necessarily harmful. Consensual instrumentalization of another person—e.g. by using them as a ‘pillow’ to lean on - can be fine (Nussbaum 1995: 265); moreover, even where there is a temporary ‘surrender of autonomy’ in sex, resulting in being objectified, this is permissible so long as generally, the ‘context is...one in which, on the whole, autonomy is respected and promoted’” (1995: 275). (Scott 193).

I disagree with Nussbaum's argument on the level of harm sexual objectification, within certain contexts, may or may not have on an individual. That being said, for the purpose of my analysis, Mackinnon and Haslanger’s work are more applicable to my general argument of sexual objectification being either implicitly or explicitly harmful to the individual experiencing it. Haslanger emphasizes, “objectification involves epistemic as well as moral harm: it involves falsely believing the objectified to have a nature which ‘makes it desirable in the ways one desires, and which enables it to satisfy that desire’ (2012: 66)” (Scott 192).

Moreover, sexual objectification refers to the act of treating a person solely as an object of sexual desire, disregarding their humanity, personality, or individuality. Per Stock’s article on sexual objectification, “to be sexually objectified means having a social meaning imposed on your being that defines you as to be sexually used, according to your desired uses, and then using you that way” (MacKinnon 1989: 327). On the basis of sexual objectification, there is a designated objectifier and objectified. As described by Stock,

“An objectifier perceives or treats the objectified as some or all of the following: as an

instrument; as lacking in autonomy; as inert or lacking in agency; as fungible; as violable; as capable of being owned; as lacking in subjectivity and whose experiences and feelings, if any, are irrelevant.” (193).

Through sexual objectification, the objectifier deprives the objectified of all their traits other than that of their physical/sexual attributes. Sexual objectification occurs in various contexts, such as media portrayals, interpersonal interactions, and societal attitudes, and it can have negative consequences for the individuals being objectified; additionally, it contributes to feelings of dehumanization, diminished self-worth, and even instances of harassment or violence. Key aspects of sexual objectification suggest that objectification encompasses both perceiving and utilizing another individual solely as a tool for personal objectives, a mindset determined by one having the *power* to do so (Stock 192). And in a patriarchal society that structurally produces misogyny, the sexual objectification of women by men both reflects and reinforces men’s structural power over women. Even through the smallest occurrences, sexual objectification can create more leniency to severer cases; “objectification theory also argues that less severe forms of sexual objectification contribute to create a cultural milieu that is more lenient toward more severe forms of sexual objectification of women” (Bernard, Legrand, Klein 100). For the purpose of my analysis, these outcomes are crucial in understanding that even with less severe cases like Jo Koy's comedy segment, there can be lasting effects. Jo Koy's segment reflects sexual objectification, and, though a considerably less severe form, perpetuates negative notions of women’s bodies through the language he used.

Methodology

My methodology for analyzing the segments from Piers Morgan, Ben Shapiro, and Jo

Koy is a feminist critique of the specific language used within these segments. Through a feminist critique, I aim to expose the underlying gender biases and inequalities embedded within the words they say and the way they say them. A feminist critique of Jo Koy, Piers Morgan, and Ben Shapiro's language acknowledges the gendered nature of oppression, and recognizes that women experience discrimination even through more "subtle" instances. A feminist critique will, then, highlight how backlash reflecting hegemonic masculinity, misogyny, and sexual objectification reinforces gendered hierarchies and expectations as well as impacts women's experiences.

A text that has utilized a similar approach includes but is not limited to "The Misogynistic Backlash Against Women-Strong Films" by Schowalter, et al. Through this, the authors showcased how certain "women-strong" films have often faced a high level of misogynistic backlash. Throughout my research so far, it has been the closest scholarly text related to my analysis as it firmly states a correlation between male critics and misogynistic backlash. In addition to this text, I also found the article "To be Heard through the #MeToo backlash" by Sabrina Moro, Giuseppina Sapio, Charlotte Buisson, Noémie Trovato and Zoé Duchamp, to be useful toward my analysis. Interestingly, these authors delve into the relationship between misogynistic backlash and popular feminism by analyzing that of the #metoo movement and the recent Depp v. Heard case. I found their remarks on the #metoo movement to be especially relevant to my research as it showcases a more severe case of misogynistic backlash, signifying how these forms of backlash are crucial to understand further.

Popular misogyny in the form of backlash on feminist popular media amplifies ongoing attacks on women in the culture and has become a concerning trend that highlights the

intersection of misogyny, online harassment, and the dynamics of digital communication. *Barbie* is a prime example in how forms of popular misogyny from male critics has been reflected throughout social media and has become quite widespread. More specifically, Piers Morgan, Ben Shapiro, and Jo Koy have all displayed their misogynistic understandings of women through their negative comments/speech acts toward *Barbie*. Though in analyzing their segments on *Barbie* as popular misogynistic representations I am contributing to feminist scholarship toward *Barbie*, it is important I emphasize that this does not in any means signify complete support of the blockbuster film. *Barbie* 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 men's dismissive criticism of feminist oriented films as well as feminist spaces, and *Barbie* has had its fair share from male critics.

Through my analysis of the rhetoric of Jo Koy, Ben Shapiro, and Piers Morgan, I will be answering the following research questions: firstly, how might charges that the movie is "anti-male" reinforce negative perceptions of feminism as a whole, and how does analyzing such then contribute to an understanding of hegemonic masculinity within our society? Secondly, how might expressions of popular misogyny from male critics impose misogynistic understandings of women's bodies and personhood more generally? 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 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. In both of these segments, the speakers speak directly to what we presume is a friendly audience that shares their misogynist ideology. Lastly, though, I focus on Jo Koy's segment to show how it showcases sexual objectification, as well as focus on the clash of different ideologies functioning within the shared space of the Golden Globes, with its mixed audience of popular feminists and popular misogynists.

Ben Shapiro

Throughout the segments from Jo Koy, Ben Shapiro, and Piers Morgan, reflections of misogynistic understandings of women are made apparent. Ben Shapiro, in particular, was especially contemptuous against *Barbie*. 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

Figure 1



as well as linguistically within the first couple minutes of his YouTube video that he despises *Barbie*. 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 specific scenes throughout *Barbie* and relaying his opinions on them.



Throughout this YouTube video, what is most important are the reasons for his contempt for the film. For Shapiro, it's not a bad film because it was made poorly. It was a bad film because of its “feminist message.” Shapiro describes profusely how *Barbie* is a bad film due to it contextualizing and representing women's struggles from a feminist perspective. Shapiro says, “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 a 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. For example, Shapiro says, “... 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, he not only diminishes the experience of women but also completely disregards the reality of these issues women often face on a day-to-day basis.

Shapiro is actively dismissing the reality of sexually objectifying language throughout his segment, reflecting a dominant patriarchal 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 mocks anything that suggests women face struggles in the world today. Ben Shapiro is creating this narrative that displays the struggles women face within *Barbie* 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*. 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 tried truestic 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 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. *Barbie* showcases a form of feminism and the constant battle that comes with that. There is no right way to be a woman in our society: you're not pretty enough/you're too pretty, you're not girly enough or you're too girly, you're too much of a prude or you're a slut which was highlighted in America's lines in *Barbie*. Shapiro is so against *Barbie* due to its representations of feminism within so much so that he actively disregards sexual violence and the discourse surrounding it. Through linguistic choices 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.

Piers Morgan

Similar to that of Ben Shapiro, Piers Morgan immediately calls attention to his opinions on *Barbie* through the title, “‘Why does empowering women have to be about trashing men?’: Piers Morgan on Barbie”. This misogynist characterization of feminism as anti-male continues throughout the entirety of his talk show along with various other opinions he has. Piers Morgan reinforces this notion further, “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). Calling feminist-focused films like *Barbie* “anti-male” 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 while simultaneously recentering



men's experiences and perspectives. 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 use 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 unless they can prove otherwise.

Women are their (men's) oppressed victims. Anyone who disagrees is obviously a misogynist” (Morgan 1:35). This consistent normalization of hegemonic masculinity combined with and/or

dismissal of the patriarchy and its effect on women invokes an ideological space where hegemonic masculinity, misogyny, and sexual objectification are paradoxically reinforced as they are being denied.

Piers Morgan and Ben Shapiro are very similar in their hatred for how *Barbie* contextualizes women's struggles. In describing the plot of *Barbie*, 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. Barbie's immediately objectified. One ghastly man shouts 'give us a smile, Blondie', which is a phrase that hasn't actually been used in the real world since probably the second World War" (Morgan 2:45). This same scene was described in Ben Shapiro's segment and both he and Piers Morgan came to the conclusion that this experience is unreal and therefore 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 language used throughout the majority of his segment suggests a contemptuous outlook on women. Morgan's lack of regard and dismissal for the issues showcased within *Barbie* 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 *Barbie* but it also showcases a contempt for the issues women face. Gerwig’s intentions of the film were to highlight these issues and bring more awareness to that, which seems to be unclear for

Morgan.

Pictured above is a screenshot from Piers Morgan’s segment including a female guest star who supports *Barbie*; 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 which in itself reinforces 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). Of course, he does not let them respond, which undercuts his point. Piers Morgan’s segment heavily reflects hegemonic masculinity and misogyny through his dialogue as he repeatedly dismisses the issues presented in the film, mocks the argument surrounding the impact of the patriarchy, and makes rebuttals regarding these impacts.

Jo Koy

Lastly, though shorter, Jo Koy’s segment from the 2024 Golden Globes has sparked a lot of controversy. Within this segment, Jo Koy is making numerous jokes regarding the nominated films, directors, etc. In doing so, Jo Koy makes a couple of 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 these critics’ heads, which is particularly ironic given that they do so in ways that further prove the need for movies like *Barbie*. 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 Gerwigs film, *Barbie*.

Pictured below 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 ideologies clashing with one another in the same space, 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, the video cuts over to Ryan Gosling’s reaction to it which, as you can see to the left, is not a good one.

This is essentially a live critique of Jo Koy’s segment.

Koy noticed it as it was transpiring

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 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 its power within society.

Conclusion

In conclusion, 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 *Barbie*, as we've seen throughout this analysis; the specific language as well as the visuals used throughout all of their segments reflect popular misogyny and 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*, we have observed attacks on feminist-focused films.

Popular misogyny is manifested through the criticism *Barbie* 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* has frequently faced scrutiny, dismissal, and even hostility from mainstream audiences and male critics. *Barbie* has been labeled as "too political" or "preachy," dismissing its messages about gender equality and social justice. Moreover, since the premier of *Barbie*, 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. Taken as a whole, the movie and its reception by men serve 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.

[I plan to add more of my argument/spice to my analysis, i promise]

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