

Alexis Yancey

Dr. Bednar

Capstone

February 5, 2024

Prospectus

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. 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, a reflection of hegemonic masculinity, misogyny, and/or the sexual objectification of women through their backlash of *Barbie: The Movie*. Through these acts of backlash, we can see how they emphasize the need for more discourse surrounding these issues.

In working through the Communication Studies discipline, it becomes prevalent how the segments from Jo Koy, Ben Shapiro, and Piers Morgan are foregrounded under rhetorical studies due to the specific verbiage/language that transpired within their videos. My methodology of critiquing their verbiage/language through a feminist lens and the certain discourses being reinforced through it (hegemonic masculinity, sexual objectification, and misogyny) will then serve as my mode of analysis. In analyzing these segments through a feminist critique, I aim to answer the following 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 backlash from

male critics reflect misogynistic understandings of women's bodies and personhood? 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, these research objects I have chosen 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. Women are constantly scrutinized for either being too sexual, or for simply not living up to a standard society has constructed for us. A standard that both men *and* women continue to pressure other women into maintaining. Through this paper, my questions of analysis will serve as guidance to perform a literature review of the following theoretical frameworks: hegemonic masculinity, sexual objectification, and misogyny.

Hegemonic Masculinity

Hegemonic masculinity has been a tackling discourse for many Communication scholars but, for the sake of my capstone project and 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, "...a particularly useful one for feminists in that it refers to 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.

Certain hierarchies have been constructed throughout hundreds of years and have essentially produced dominant ideologies as well as non-dominant ideologies, as we can not 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; overall, 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.

Under the analysis of Ben Shapiro, Jo Koy, and Piers Morgan hegemonic masculinity is pertinent in understanding the impact of the language they used within their segments on the Barbie movie. All three individuals come from a place of benefitting from hegemonic masculinity and it is apparent through the specific language/verbiage 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; hegemonic masculinity, then, enables other forms of women subjugation like misogyny.

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 (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. 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 transgresses from the generalized perception of “individual hatred or hostility towards any and every woman, or women in general, simply because they are women” (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”. 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.

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”

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

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 the Barbie movie.

In addition to this, there has also been disputes on whether or not sexual objectification is always harmful. Nussbaum, for example, has criticized that of 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). In any case, sexual objectification is fundamentally harmful as it contributes to bigger issues of disregarding one's personhood for their sexual attributes.

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, it becomes incredibly prevalent how 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). Even through the smallest occurrences, sexual objectification can create more leniency to severer cases; it's argued, "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 verbiage/language used within these research objects. Through a feminist critique, I aim to expose the underlying gender biases and inequalities embedded within my research objects. A feminist critique of Jo Koy, Piers Morgan, and Ben Shapiro's language within their segments of backlash 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 prevalent toward my research as it showcases a more severe case of misogynistic backlash, signifying how these forms of backlash are crucial in understanding further.

Works Cited

- Banet-Weiser, Sarah. *Empowered: Popular Feminism and Popular Misogyny*. JSTOR, Duke University Press, 2018,
www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/j.ctv11316rx.3.pdf?refreqid=fastly-default%3A5eee2ab519e221494d103916e5e16bcb&ab_segments=&origin=&initiator=&acceptTC=1. Accessed 13 Feb. 2024.
- Barker, Kim, and Olga Jurasz. "Online Misogyny: A Challenge for Digital Feminism?" *Journal of International Affairs*, vol. 72, no. 2, 2019, pp. 95–114,
www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/26760834.pdf?refreqid=fastly-default%3Aafb88b07e2e710249d46c9017a27ab58&ab_segments=0%2FSYC-7052%2Fcontrol&origin=&initiator=&acceptTC=1. Accessed 13 Feb. 2024.
- Bernard, Philippe, et al. "From Bodies to Blame: Exposure to Sexually Objectifying Media Increases Tolerance toward Sexual Harassment." *Psychology of Popular Media Culture*, vol. 7, no. 2, Apr. 2018, pp. 99–112, <https://doi.org/10.1037/ppm0000114>. Accessed 23 Jan. 2024.
- Buiten, Denise. "Silences Stifling Transformation: Misogyny and Gender-Based Violence in the Media." *Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equity*, no. 71, 2007, pp. 114–121,
www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/27739254.pdf?refreqid=fastly-default%3Ac7ce6e97efc507f9dbbb16e5951cee69&ab_segments=0%2Fbasic_search_gsv2%2Fcontrol&origin=&initiator=&acceptTC=1. Accessed 13 Feb. 2024.
- Calogero, Rachel M. "Objects Don't Object: Evidence That Self-Objectification Disrupts Women's Social Activism." *Psychological Science*, vol. 24, no. 3, 2013, pp. 312–318,
www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/23355121.pdf?refreqid=fastly-default%3Ae793aee3ec53e12a23

c4486f8d0960d6&ab_segments=0%2Fbasic_search_gsv2%2Fcontrol&origin=&initiator=&acceptTC=1. Accessed 13 Feb. 2024.

Díaz, Pablo Castillo, and Nahla Valji. “Symbiosis of Misogyny and Violent Extremism: New Understandings and Policy Implications.” *Journal of International Affairs*, vol. 72, no. 2, 2019, pp. 37–56,
www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/26760831.pdf?refreqid=fastly-default%3A52803cfd5f595e830add95be9a3953e2&ab_segments=0%2Fbasic_search_gsv2%2Fcontrol&origin=&initiator=&acceptTC=1. Accessed 13 Feb. 2024.

Donaldson, Mike. “What Is Hegemonic Masculinity?” *Theory and Society*, vol. 22, no. 5, 1993, pp. 643–657,
www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/657988.pdf?refreqid=fastly-default%3A34c49e7c3efbd9c834653245f879f494&ab_segments=0%2FSYC-7052%2Fcontrol&origin=&initiator=&acceptTC=1. Accessed 13 Feb. 2024.

Lahiry, Sujit. “THEORISING HEGEMONY, US HEGEMONY AND THE POST-SECOND WORLD WAR ORDER.” *World Affairs: The Journal of International Issues*, vol. 17, no. 2, 2013, pp. 176–82. *JSTOR*, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48531691>. Accessed 13 Feb. 2024.

Manne, Kate. *DOWN GIRL: The Logic of Misogyny*. Oxford University Press, 2018.

Melo Lopes, Filipa. “Perpetuating the Patriarchy: Misogyny and (Post-)Feminist Backlash.” *Philosophical Studies*, vol. 176, no. 9, 9 July 2018, pp. 2517–2538,
link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11098-018-1138-z,
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11098-018-1138-z>. Accessed 13 Feb. 2024.

Moro, Sabrina, et al. "To Be Heard through the #MeToo Backlash." *Soundings: A Journal of Politics and Culture*, vol. 83, no. 83, 2023, pp. 90–101, muse.jhu.edu/article/899228/pdf.

Accessed 13 Feb. 2024.

Przybylowicz, Donna. "Toward a Feminist Cultural Criticism: Hegemony and Modes of Social Division." *Cultural Critique*, no. 14, 1989, p. 259, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1354300>.

Accessed 21 Feb. 2019.

Rieder, Paula M. "The Uses and Misuses of Misogyny: A Critical Historiography of the Language of Medieval Women's Oppression." *Historical Reflections / Réflexions Historiques*, vol. 38, no. 1, 2012, pp. 1–18, www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/23267757.pdf?refreqid=fastly-default%3Ab67b297d843cd78b3321cdedefdbc9a0&ab_segments=0%2Fbasic_search_gsv2%2Fcontrol&origin=&initiator=&acceptTC=1. Accessed 13 Feb. 2024.

Stock, Kathleen. "Sexual Objectification." *Analysis*, vol. 75, no. 2, 2015, pp. 191–95. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24671239>. Accessed 13 Feb. 2024.

Schowalter, Dana, et al. *The Misogynistic Backlash against Women-Strong Films*. Routledge, 29 Nov. 2021.

