



Toxic Masculinity Represented by Ryan Gosling's Ken in the Barbie (2023)

Patricia Laisa^{1*}

¹ English Literature, Universitas Ahmad Dahlan Yogyakarta, 55164, Indonesia

*Correspondent email author: patricia1900026160@webmail.uad.ac.id

ABSTRACT

Keywords:
Toxic Masculinity
Ken's
Barbie
John Fiske
Patriarchy

The Barbie (2023) movie, directed by Greta Gerwig, prominently includes Ken, portrayed by Ryan Gosling, as a significant narrative component. In this short, Ken demonstrates many actions indicative of toxic masculinity. This study seeks to examine the depiction of toxic masculinity in the character Ken using John Fiske's semiotic theory, employing three analytical tiers: the level of actuality, the representative level, and the ideological level. The study technique is qualitative, using an interpretative paradigm to discern the underlying meanings of Ken's conduct and discussion that illustrate symptoms of toxic masculinity. The research reveals that Ken's physical appearance and behaviour exemplify masculine stereotypes, including dominance and aggression, as seen by his attire, body posture, and interactions with other characters. Ken is shown as a figure seeking attention and power, often at the expense of himself and others. This study demonstrates that the character Ken embodies societal perceptions of the expectation for males to assert dominance, resulting in discontent and identity issues. This study concludes that the Barbie (2023) movie challenges toxic masculinity via the character Ken, demonstrating that this paradigm is detrimental to both men and women and advocates for freedom from restrictive and damaging norms of masculinity. This movie critiques toxic masculinity satirically, facilitating additional discourse on the formation and perception of masculinity in society.

This is an open access article under the [CC-BY-SA](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/) license.



1. Introduction

Toxic masculinity is a concept that has gained prominence in contemporary discourse around gender. It denotes a collection of actions and attitudes conventionally linked to masculinity. However, they are ultimately detrimental, affecting both men and others in their vicinity. It often entails compelling males to repress their emotions, project dominance, aggression, or stoicism, and dismiss attributes considered "feminine," such as empathy or vulnerability (Christensen, 2022). When males feel compelled to adhere to these stringent standards, it may cultivate atmospheres of aggression, domination, and emotional suppression conduct that results in individual and social detriment. This does not imply that all manifestations of masculinity are detrimental, but when certain features are exalted at the expense of healthy emotional expression, the consequences are adverse (Kirby, 2019).

Toxic masculinity often fosters a patriarchal milieu whereby males frequently assert dominance in many contexts, regardless of size. That undoubtedly results in significant losses for women. Women may see themselves as confined, deemed weak, and rendered inconsequential (Rivera & Scholar, 2020). Toxic masculinity originates from societal settings that transform behaviors into norms. Examples include: "Men must exhibit strength", "Men must possess mechanical aptitude", "Men must

demonstrate trustworthiness”, “Men must display courage in all situations”, and “Men must refrain from expressing emotions”. Many of these have come to epitomize masculinity while not being absolute facts and not necessarily requiring adherence. Nevertheless, several aspects of toxic masculinity persistently get reinforced in popular culture, including film, television, sports, and politics (Sculos, 2023).

In the contemporary media world, toxic masculinity is often both criticized and reinforced concurrently. Despite the growing prevalence of films and television programs that seek to dismantle detrimental preconceptions about males, several cultural artifacts continue to perpetuate conventional gender norms, sometimes without deliberate intention (Ganguly & Dutta, 2019). *Barbie* (2023), directed by Greta Gerwig, adopts a subversive perspective by exploring these problems within the context of a highly marketed and conventionally gendered object. The film employs satire and a whimsical tone to condemn both the portrayal of women via the character of Barbie and the societal expectations imposed on males, represented by the figure of Ken.

This project will examine toxic masculinity via the character of Ken, as depicted by Ryan Gosling in the *Barbie* (2023), directed by Greta Gerwig, assessing how his behaviors, attitudes, and actions embody wider societal ideals of toxic masculinity. Ken's character serves as a focal point for examining the construction of toxic masculinity and its impact on men and their interpersonal connections, especially with women. Ken epitomizes a satire of conventional masculinity, and his character development allows the film to critique the detrimental aspects of enduring masculine stereotypes in society.

The research referenced above is the study by Irfan Hermawan and Nur Hidayah (2023) entitled “Toxic Masculinity and the Challenges Faced by Men in Modern Indonesian Society”. The study elucidates the emergence of toxic masculinity beliefs inside Indonesian culture, along with the manifestations or motivations of toxic masculinity conduct. The findings reveal the presence of psychological pressure, intimidation, bullying, and ostracism in contemporary Indonesian culture. Furthermore, the researchers identified many elements, including internal ones stemming from the family, attributed to inadequate socialization and insufficient education about toxic masculinity or gender equality within the familial context. External influences arise from societal conservatism, adherence to antiquated customs, and insufficient knowledge of gender equality (Hermawan & Hidayah, 2023).

The following study cited is by Ahmad Jais (2022) entitled *Toxic Masculinity Represented in Sol Yurick's The Warriors*. This study aims to tackle two issue statements. What does Hector symbolize about Toxic Masculinity in the book *The Warriors* by Sol Yurick? What are the manifestations of toxic masculinity in gender interactions in *The Warriors* by Sol Yurick? This research identified three manifestations of toxic masculinity in Hector's character: 1) Misogyny, Hector expresses disdain for women, labeling them as troublemakers and prostitutes; 2) Domination, Hector exerts control over others using harsh language; 3) Violence, Hector engages in theft. The researchers identified toxic manifestations of masculinity within gender dynamics, including power interactions, production relations, emotional ties, and symbolic representations. Toxic masculinity manifests as misogyny in power interactions, as violence and misogyny in production relations, as dominance and misogyny in emotional relationships, and as domination in symbolic contexts. This study indicates that the book *The Warriors* portrays toxic masculinity via the character Hector and exemplifies manifestations of toxic masculinity in gender interactions (Jais, 2022).

The latest recognized paper by Tasya Nurbani and Adrio Kusmareza Adim (2024) is titled “Representation of Toxic Masculinity in *The Croods* Film through John Fiske's Semiotic Analysis”. This research uses John Fiske's semiotic analysis to examine the notion of toxic masculinity, as shown via the character Grug in the film *The Croods*. The character Grug exhibits toxic masculinity via aggression and intimidation, hypermasculinity with punching gestures symbolizing authority, and a deficiency in expressing authentic feelings. Grug exemplifies the attributes of sexism, greed, and aggressive domination, which are indicative of toxic masculinity. It has been shown that Grug's toxic masculinity is rooted in conservatism, which may be regarded as the underlying worldview (Nurbani & Adim, 2024).

Following is the formulation of the issue, which is acquired from the description given above and from past research: (1) What aspects of toxic masculinity are there in Ken's portrayal of the

character? (2) What are the elements that, according to the movie's storyline, lead to Ken's presence of toxic masculinity? The three-level semiotic analysis developed by John Fiske may be used to explain the formulation of the issue. This research will give a full grasp of how toxic masculinity functions in contemporary cinematic texts and the messages it transmits about gender norms by providing answers to the issues that have been posed.

2. Method

This study utilizes a qualitative research approach within an interpretative framework, concentrating on the depiction of toxic masculinity in the character Ken, portrayed by Ryan Gosling in *Barbie* (2023). The qualitative technique is suitable for this study since it prioritizes the investigation of subjective meanings and the intricacies of social processes as represented in media. In this instance, qualitative analysis aids in comprehending the representation, criticism, and potential deconstruction of toxic masculinity via Ken's character development.

The interpretative paradigm focuses on comprehending and elucidating meaning derived from social and cultural symbols (Baga & Podungge, 2024). This framework is especially beneficial for media studies since cultural artifacts (such as films) are imbued with signals that convey profound meanings about societal norms and ideas. This paradigm enables the analysis to elucidate how *Barbie* (2023) embodies toxic masculinity via its characters, visual narrative, and speech. In this framework, the researcher posits that meaning is not static but is generated by the interactions between the film and the viewer. The objective is not to attain a unique "truth" but to analyze how many facets of Ken's character embody wider societal myths around masculinity, power, and gender.

This study employs John Fiske's semiotic theory as the principal analytical framework, concentrating on the three tiers of semiotic analysis: reality, representation, and ideology (Wicaksono & Nur, 2023). Semiotics, examining signs and symbols, is especially pertinent for media analysis since films are abundant in visual and narrative signals embodying societal ideals.

1. **Reality Level:** This level of study analyzes the superficial behaviors and interactions of Ken, with special emphasis on activities that illustrate characteristics of toxic masculinity. The researcher will pinpoint instances when Ken's actions correspond with societal expectations of masculinity, including his desire for domination, fixation on power, and emotional repression.
2. **Representation Level:** This level examines how the film delineates Ken's masculinity via visual and narrative techniques. This includes analyzing attire, nonverbal communication, conversation, and scene composition. The research will examine how filmmakers use these tactics to depict Ken's toxic masculinity, focusing on instances when Ken assumes hyper-masculine postures or exhibits patriarchal behaviors after his exposure to the patriarchal system of the "real world".
3. **Ideological Level:** This level examines Ken's persona's overarching sociological and ideological themes. This study examines how the film criticizes toxic masculinity by depicting Ken's quest for power as ultimately unfulfilling and detrimental. The analysis will also investigate how *Barbie* (2023) critiques gender norms and the constraints exerted on males to adhere to certain masculine standards. This study will examine the ideological implications of Ken's character journey, elucidating how the film challenges conventional views of masculinity and presents alternative, healthier forms of gender identity.




The primary data for this study include sequences from *Barbie* (2023) in which Ken exhibits behaviors linked to toxic masculinity. The selection of these sequences will adhere to precise criteria: instances illustrating Ken's power conflicts, his relationships with other characters (notably Barbie), and his internal battle with self-worth and masculinity. The study will include documenting particular timestamps and dialogues that illustrate these characteristics, offering tangible instances of how toxic masculinity is formulated and contested inside the film.




3. Result and Discussion

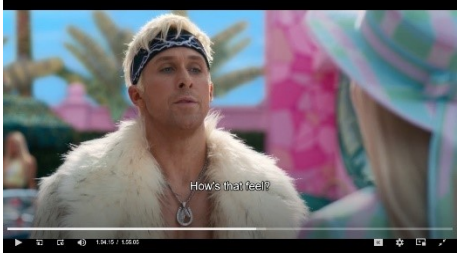


Following observations of the film *Barbie* (2023) and an analysis of the character Ken, identified as embodying Toxic Masculinity, the findings of this research are presented as follows:


3.1. Results

Table 1. Representation of Toxic Masculinity Scenes of the character Ken (Barbie, 2023)

No	Scene	Analysis Semiotic John Fiske
1	 <p>Duration: 41:57</p> <p>Ken was approached by a woman to ask what time it was, and at that moment, Ken was surprised and felt honoured by a woman.</p>	<p>Reality Level:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Costume: Wearing a cowboy hat, with a black fringed outfit. 2. Expression: Looking arrogant with head held high 3. Behavior: Responding with full confidence, feeling respected and entitled to refuse. 4. Dialogue: "No, i do not" <p>Representation Level:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Shot Type: Medium shot and over the shoulder 2. Lighting: Artificial light 3. Sound Usage: With a firm tone of voice that sounds like rejection. 4. Conflict: Ken begins to believe that men have the right to rule women.
2	 <p>Duration: 59:12</p> <p>Upon her arrival in Barbie Land, Barbie inquired about the alterations and the fate of Ken.</p>	<p>Reality Level:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Costume: Wearing a black bandana, a white fur robe, boxing gloves, and a necklace with a bare muscular chest. 2. Expression: Looks arrogant with a condescending gaze. 3. Behavior: Ken mocks and belittles Barbie. 4. Dialogue: "Don't question it" "Just roll with it, tiny baby" <p>Representation Level:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Shot Type: Medium shot and over the shoulder 2. Lighting: Artificial light 3. Sound Usage: In a condescending or mocking tone. 4. Conflict: Ken mocks Barbie by calling her Tiny Baby.
3	 <p>Duration: 59:18</p> <p>Ken started to intimidate Barbie by calling her "Little One" and using gestures or body language typical of a bully.</p>	<p>Reality Level:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Costume: Wearing a black bandana, a white fur cloak, a necklace, and an open muscular chest, along with boots. 2. Expression: Looks arrogant with a condescending gaze with feet on the mini fridge. 3. Behavior: Ken mocks Barbie and belittles her. 4. Dialogue: "What about mini baby?" "Like this mini fridge" <p>Representation Level:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Shot Type: Medium shot and over the shoulder 2. Lighting: Artificial light 3. Sound Usage: With a condescending or mocking tone. 4. Conflict: Ken mocks Barbie and compares her to a mini fridge.

No	Scene	Analysis Semiotic John Fiske
4	 <p>Duration: 1:00:39</p> <p>Ken began to lose control; feeling enraged and distressed, he vandalized objects with a golf club. This was executed to demonstrate his supremacy and the need for obedience from everyone.</p>	<p>Reality Level:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Costume: Wearing a Black Bandana, a White Fur Cloak, a Necklace, and an Open Chest, holding a Golf Club. 2. Expression: Annoyed and Angry 3. Behavior: Ken starts to get annoyed and angry, holding a Golf Club to destroy Barbie's belongings. 4. Dialogue: "You can stay if u want, as my bride wife, or long term low commitment distance girlfriend" <p>Representation Level:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Shot Type: Medium long shot 2. Lighting: Artificial light 3. Sound Usage: High-pitched voice by Ken. 4. Conflict: Ken tells Barbie to stay if she wants, either as a wife or just as a partner without status, while holding a golf club and starting to destroy things to show dominance that he is a strong man.
5	 <p>Duration: 1:00:47</p> <p>Ken started to feel like a leader and tried to order Barbie to get him a beer, treating her like a servant.</p>	<p>Reality Level:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Costume: Wearing a black bandana, a white fur robe, a necklace, and an open muscular chest while playing foosball. 2. Expression: Looks arrogant with a condescending gaze 3. Behavior: Ken orders Barbie to get him a beer. 4. Dialogue: "Brewski beer me?" <p>Representation Level:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Shot Type: Medium shot 2. Lighting: Artificial light 3. Sound Usage: In a condescending or mocking tone. 4. Conflict: Ken considers himself the ruler or leader, so he starts commanding Barbie to get him a beer as if she were a servant.
6	 <p>Duration: 1:01:49</p> <p>Ken, standing on top of the car hood, began to announce that now Ken Land would become a place where men could have power just like in the city of Los Angeles.</p>	<p>Reality Level:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Costume: Wearing a black bandana, a white fur cloak, a necklace, and an open muscular chest, along with boots. 2. Expression: Looks arrogant with a condescending gaze. 3. Behavior: Ken said that Barbie Land has transformed into Ken Land (Kendom), resembling Los Angeles, where men may get the ladies they want. He said this while entering a vehicle with the demeanor of a sovereign or monarch of Ken Land. 4. Dialogue: "And it's gonna be just like Century City in Los Angeles" <p>Representation Level:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Shot Type: Long shot

No	Scene	Analysis Semiotic John Fiske
		2. Lighting: Artificial light 3. Sound Usage: With a condescending or mocking tone. 4. Conflict: Ken mocks Barbie and compares her to a mini fridge.
7	 <p>Duration: 1:04:15 Ken feels he has won and taken over Barbie Land, turning it into Ken Lan (Kendom), then tells Barbie how he feels now after being ousted and considered insignificant.</p>	Reality Level: 1. Costume: Wearing a black bandana, a white fur robe, and a necklace with a bare muscular chest. 2. Expression: Looks arrogant with a condescending gaze. 3. Behavior: Ken says how it feels right now? Humiliated and cast out. 4. Dialogue: “How’s that feel?” Representation Level: 1. Shot Type: Medium shot and over the shoulder 2. Lighting: Artificial light 3. Sound Usage: With a tone like a vengeful person. 4. Conflict: Ken talks about how it feels to be expelled and not considered important.
8	 <p>Duration: 1:20:14 All the Kens gathered and said that they could demonstrate and teach all the Barbies how to use sports equipment or all sports.</p>	Reality Level: 1. Costume: Wearing a pink bandana, a black jacket, a waist bag, holding dumbbells in both hands. 2. Expression: Looks confident. 3. Behavior: Ken states that men can teach women sports or how to use sports equipment. 4. Dialogue: “Here let us show you.” Representation Level: 1. Shot Type: Long shot 2. Lighting: Artificial light 3. Sound Usage: With an inviting and confident tone. 4. Conflict: Ken believes that men can master all sports while women cannot, so he wants all Barbies to learn with Ken. The underlying message is that all men want to be relied upon in everything.
9	 <p>Duration: 1:21:47 Ken met Barbie, who approached him at home to request that he become her lover, with a calm, deep, and assertive tone. At that moment, Ken said that he</p>	Reality Level: 1. Costume: Wearing a denim jacket, collar up, and holding a book. 2. Expression: Looking arrogant and confident. 3. Behavior: Ken greets Barbie, who comes to his house, saying that Barbie found him while he was reading. 4. Dialogue: “Oh, hey. You’ve caught me reading” Representation Level: 1. Shot Type: Medium shot and over the shoulder 2. Lighting: Artificial light

No	Scene	Analysis Semiotic John Fiske
	was perusing a book to project an image of intellectualism.	3. Sound Usage: In a relaxed voice. 4. Conflict: Ken shows that he is an intellectual man by claiming to be reading a book.
10	<div></div> <p>Duration: 1:26:42</p> <p>Ken harbors resentment against another Ken due to feelings of betrayal, despite the situation being provoked by the Barbies. At the commencement of the battle, Ken performs the song “I’m Just Ken”.</p>	<p>Reality Level:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Costume: Wearing a black bandana, a white fur cloak, black gloves, and riding a toy horse.2. Expression: Looks sadly and angry.3. Behavior: Ken starts fighting with other Kens while singing the song “I’m just Ken”.4. Dialogue: “What about mini baby?” “Like this mini fridge” <p>Representation Level:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Shot Type: Medium shot and long shot2. Lighting: Artificial light3. Sound Usage: Singing with a firm, angry, and loud voice.4. Conflict: Ken begins to compete by fighting over Barbie, which is obviously natural for a man because, fundamentally, something is obtained through fighting or competition.

Ideological Level:

Ken’s portrayal of toxic masculinity reflects broader societal ideologies surrounding gender and power. This level examines how the film communicates implicit messages about gender roles and social structures, particularly through its critique of patriarchal values (Yakali, 2024).

In the film, Ken’s initial lack of agency and dependence on Barbie is a direct inversion of traditional gender roles, where men are typically portrayed as dominant and women as submissive. However, when Ken encounters the patriarchy in the real world, he quickly embraces its ideals, believing that power and control over others will give him the validation he craves. This shift highlights how toxic masculinity is often constructed as a reaction to feelings of inadequacy or marginalization, suggesting that patriarchal systems offer men a sense of belonging and authority when they feel powerless (Sculos, 2023).

Toxic masculinity is something that arises in Ken's character when he experiences feelings of being devalued and unimportant without Barbie, even in front of Barbie herself. This causes him to have a crisis inside himself questioning his presence in Barbie Land. The patriarchal system that Ken encounters in the real world fundamentally alters his perception of power, leading him to transform Barbie Land into a "Kendom," where he assumes dominance and compels the Barbies to cater to the whims and activities of all the Kens.

Ken’s newfound authority is also reflected in his shift in fashion, inspired by the hyper-masculine styles he observes outside Barbie Land. He adopts an eccentric wardrobe, including a fur coat reminiscent of Sylvester Stallone’s iconic look, sleeveless denim outerwear, a silver chain adorned with a horse pendant, and a fanny pack emblazoned with his name in Metallica-style font. Additionally, Ken’s outfits range from cowboy attire to that of a boxer, symbolizing his attempt to embody traditional symbols of masculinity through exaggerated, hyper-masculine aesthetics.

This shift in attire serves as a visual representation of Ken’s internalization of patriarchal ideals, reflecting his desire to assert dominance by adopting an appearance that aligns with stereotypical male power figures (Fadyaramadhani et al., 2024). Through this transformation, the film satirically critiques

how superficial symbols of masculinity are often conflated with authority and strength, ultimately exposing the absurdity and hollowness of such representations (Addis & Kironde, 2020).

3.2. Discussion

In analyzing Ken's portrayal of toxic masculinity in *Barbie* (2023) through John Fiske's three levels of semiotics, a detailed breakdown of specific scenes reveals how toxic masculinity is constructed visually, behaviorally, and ideologically throughout the film. Below is a discussion based on the data provided in the table, which uses key scenes to explore Ken's evolving sense of male dominance.

Scene 1: Duration 41:57 - Ken's Exposition on Male Dominance: Ken exhibits an exaggerated feeling of self-importance after a woman's inquiry about the time in this scene. Ken's reaction, contemptuous and imbued with confidence, exemplifies a fundamental characteristic of toxic masculinity: entitlement. At the level of actuality, Ken's attire, including a cowboy hat and fringed ensemble, epitomizes conventional male tropes, yet his demeanor and attitude (arrogantly elevating his head) convey a newly acquired authority. The representation level is enhanced with a medium shot, over-the-shoulder framing, and assertive conversation delivery, underscoring his escalating conviction that males need to "dominate" women. This nuanced change illustrates how external approval may incite toxic masculinity, further underscored by his dismissive response, "No, I do not".

Scene 2: Duration 59:12 - Satire and Domination: Ken's influence is completely established upon Barbie's return to an altered Barbie Land. Ken's attire, including a fur robe, boxing gloves, and an exposed torso, epitomizes his excessive embrace of hyper-masculine symbols, so perpetuating a caricature of male supremacy. At the level of reality, his derisive language ("Just roll with it, tiny baby") exemplifies Ken's attempt to demean Barbie, establishing his dominance. The representation level depicts this with a medium shot, using artificial lighting that amplifies his contempt. The ideological level indicates that Ken has absorbed a patriarchal perspective, seeing the belittlement of women as a source of power. This illustrates how toxic masculinity often develops via the want to dominate and demean others, particularly women, to assert superiority.

Scene 3: Duration 1:00:39 - Exhibition of Aggressive Authority: Ken's violent outburst, during which he vandalizes Barbie's possessions with a golf club, shows the aggressive facets of toxic masculinity. At the tangible level, his attire consists of a hyper-masculine fur cloak and an exposed breast, complemented with a golf club as an emblem of authority and dominance. His dissatisfaction is obvious in his irate emotions and destructive conduct. The representation level employs a medium-long shot to illustrate the magnitude of his aggressiveness. This scenario supports patriarchal beliefs by showing Ken's recourse to violence to demonstrate control when his authority is challenged. His insistence that Barbie remains either his wife or a "low-commitment girlfriend" illustrates his perception of women as things to be dominated rather than as equals.

Scene 5: Duration 1:00:47 - Subjugating Barbie: Ken's entitlement escalates when he commands Barbie to get a drink, treating her as a subordinate. His authoritative tone, along with the derisive phrase "Brewski beer me?" exemplifies a conspicuous manifestation of toxic masculinity when women are seen as inferior to males. At the level of actuality, his attire—a strong chest, fur robe, and bandana—is a persistent emblem of hyperbolic masculinity. His body language and emotions, characterized by arrogance and condescension, enhance his control. The representation utilizes a medium shot, highlighting his dominance inside the frame. This event highlights the deep-seated conviction that males are entitled to women's subservience and that power is exercised via the domination of others.

Scene 10: Duration 1:26:42 - Toxic Masculinity and Rivalry: During the climactic showdown among the Kens, they engage in a physical altercation while executing "I'm Just Ken." The reality level depicts Ken in an exaggeratedly macho ensemble, complete with a black bandana and gloves, emblematic of rivalry and hostility. His expressions—sorrow intertwined with rage—exemplify the fundamental fears influencing his conduct. The representation level employs medium and long shots to illustrate the struggle as a metaphor for masculine competition and the need to assert control via physicality. This ideological perspective opposes the notion that masculinity is characterized by rivalry and aggressiveness, indicating that social expectations of power and dominance often set men against one another in detrimental ways.

Ken's behavior culminates in his assertion that Barbie Land has become "Kendom," paralleling the real world where men control power structures. His dialogue reflects a complete adoption of patriarchal values, illustrating how he perceives women as objects to be ordered and controlled, rather than equals. This transformation critiques the social constructs that often equate masculinity with authority and dominance, reinforcing how these traits harm both men and women (Prayoga, 2023). The film uses these exaggerated representations to highlight the absurdity of toxic masculinity, exposing its inherent fragility and how it perpetuates harmful gender norms.

Scholarly research supports the idea that exposure to patriarchal norms can reinforce toxic masculine behaviors. A study by Angga Ferdian (2018) highlights how men who internalize patriarchal values are more likely to exhibit dominance, entitlement, and aggression as a way to assert control. In Ken's case, his experience in the real world validates his feelings of inadequacy and gives him a model of masculinity that is linked to power and domination. Insecurity and Lack of Identity Throughout the film, Ken's sense of self-worth is depicted as fragile and dependent on Barbie's validation. This insecurity drives his toxic behaviors, as he compensates for his perceived lack of importance by attempting to assert dominance over Barbie Land. His transformation into a hyper-masculine figure, complete with exaggerated physical appearance and aggressive behavior, is a direct result of this internal struggle.

Furthermore, Ken's character displays Toxic Masculinity due to his perceived deficiency in power and control over Barbie in Barbie Land; he perceives Barbie as possessing greater power and control than himself. Research by Wijaya & Nugroho (2024), indicated that males exhibit more comfort when they can exert control over certain conditions, a sentiment not experienced by Ken in the film while in Barbie Land. In today's society, it remains challenging to dismantle the long-standing perception that toxic masculinity is the standard for acceptable male behavior. Many individuals still hold the belief that certain activities, such as using skincare products or expressing emotions publicly, are exclusively for women. When men engage in these behaviors-whether it's through taking care of their skin, crying, or openly discussing their feelings-they are often ridiculed as weak or even labeled as "feminine." This stigma not only reinforces outdated gender norms but also discourages men from embracing emotional vulnerability, which is a healthy aspect of human expression (Rimaitè, 2024).

Furthermore, societal expectations place undue pressure on men to excel in a wide array of skills, many of which they may not naturally possess or enjoy. For instance, there is a prevailing belief that men must be proficient in playing music, have muscular physiques, and be reliable in all situations, regardless of their actual preferences or abilities. Men are also expected to participate in sports and be physically capable, reinforcing a narrow and restrictive definition of masculinity. These unrealistic demands contribute to a harmful environment where men who fail to meet these rigid expectations are often subjected to social exclusion, bullying, or even hostility from both their communities and families (McGlashan & Mercer, 2023). This creates a cycle of toxic masculinity, where men feel compelled to conform to damaging standards, rather than being allowed to express themselves authentically and without judgment (Ramdani et al., 2022).

4. Conclusion

In Barbie (2023), Ken's toxic masculinity is shown via actions and attitudes that highlight power, control, and the repression of emotional vulnerability. Throughout the film, Ken demonstrates entitlement, arrogance, and violence, especially in his encounters with Barbie and the other Barbies. Notable instances include his authoritative control when he converts Barbie Land into "Kendom", a realm where Kens wield authority and Barbies are assigned subordinate positions. Ken's deleterious actions are shown by his hyper-masculine clothing, including fur robes, a muscular chest, and bandanas, which signify power and conventional male dominance. These external alterations signify an interior transition towards a more patriarchal ideology. In many moments, Ken condescendingly addresses Barbie, labeling her as a "tiny baby" and "little one", so undermining her position while enhancing his own. His conduct intensifies into violence and devastation, exemplified by his destruction of Barbie's possessions with a golf club in a futile effort to establish supremacy.

The elements contributing to Ken's toxic masculinity are complex. A primary factor is his exposure to patriarchal standards in the actual world, which contrasts with his absence of authority in Barbie Land. In reality, Ken observes the manifestation of masculine dominance, which reinforces his fears

and compels him to engage in harmful behaviors to get power and control. Moreover, Ken's emotional reliance on Barbie engenders emotions of inadequacy, prompting him to overcompensate via violent, hyper-masculine behaviors. This aligns with the conclusions of Čonkaš et al. (2023), indicating that men who experience insecurity about their masculinity often exhibit actions aimed at asserting authority over others to regain their self-worth. Ken's internal struggle and tenuous self-worth propel him towards a masculinity paradigm that associates power with affirmation, resulting in the toxic actions seen in the film.

Suggestion in this research is, important for readers to recognize that Barbie (2023) uses Ken's character to critique the harmful effects of toxic masculinity on both men and women. Toxic masculinity not only perpetuates power imbalances between genders but also traps men in restrictive emotional roles, where vulnerability and self-reflection are viewed as weaknesses. The film suggests that embracing healthier, more inclusive models of masculinity—ones that allow for emotional openness, equality, and mutual respect—leads to greater personal fulfillment. For those watching the film or reflecting on its messages, it is essential to question societal expectations of gender and consider how cultural norms around masculinity and power might be contributing to negative behaviors in real life.

To move forward, it is crucial for both men and women to challenge traditional patriarchal structures and promote emotional expression and vulnerability in men as strengths rather than weaknesses. Advocating for more nuanced and empathetic portrayals of masculinity in media can contribute to broader cultural shifts that foster healthier gender dynamics and reduce the harmful effects of toxic masculinity. By encouraging conversations about gender expectations and power dynamics, we can create a more equitable society where both men and women can thrive without the burden of rigid stereotypes.

5. Acknowledgement

I am the author, and I deeply appreciate the invaluable assistance and guidance offered by my parents, who have played a crucial role in the successful completion of this project. Furthermore, I express my deepest appreciation to my tutoring lecturer, Mr Drs. Nizam Ahsani, M.Hum., PhD, as his guidance and insights have significantly enhanced the calibre of this research. Moreover, the author conveys his sincere appreciation to Prof. Dr. Muchlas, M.T., the Rector; Wajiran S.S., Ph.D., the Dean, and Dani Fadillah S.I.Kom., M.A., the Vice Dean of the Faculty of Literature, Culture, and Communication. The author also acknowledges to Drs. Maftukin M.Hum., the Head of the English Literature Department, along with all the esteemed lecturers at Ahmad Dahlan University. In light of the limitations inherent in this study, the author sincerely apologises and hopes that this research will be a valuable resource for future inquiries.

6. References

- Addis, M. E., & Kironde, E. (2020). Book Review: Is masculinity toxic? A primer for the 21st century. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 44(3), 420–421. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0361684320926684>
- Angga Ferdian. (2018). Toxic Masculinity Represented By Patrick Bateman in Mary Harron's American Psycho. In *Http://Eprints.Undip.Ac.Id/*. Universitas Diponegoro.
- Baga, M., & Podungge, R. (2024). Representation of Toxic Masculinity in Steve Rogers' Captain America: The First Avenger. *Transformatika: Jurnal Bahasa, Sastra, Dan Pengajarannya*, 8(1), 1. <https://doi.org/10.31002/transformatika.v8i1.7974>
- Christensen, L. N. R. (2022). *Could It Be Anymore Toxic? Toxic Masculinity and the Power of Representation in Friends* (Issue May).
- Čonkaš, J., Sabol, M., & Ozretić, P. (2023). 'Toxic Masculinity': What Is Known about the Role of Androgen Receptors in Head and Neck Squamous Cell Carcinoma. *International Journal of Molecular Sciences*, 24(4), 3766. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijms24043766>

- Fadyaramadhani, N., Nirwan, & Wardhani, H. S. (2024). Fantasy : Exploring Moral Values in Barbie Movie 2023. *DEIKTIS: Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa Dan Sastra*, 4(2), 153–163.
- Ganguly, D., & Dutta, M. (2019). The Effect of Toxic Masculinity in Indian Films on Society Theme: Role of women in Cinema and Literature: Changes over time. *Sustainability (Switzerland)*, 11(1), 1–14. http://scioteca.caf.com/bitstream/handle/123456789/1091/RED2017-Eng-8ene.pdf?sequence=12&isAllowed=y%0Ahttp://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.regsciurbeco.2008.06.005%0Ahttps://www.researchgate.net/publication/305320484_SISTEM_PEMBETUNGAN_TERPUSAT_STRATEGI_MELESTARI
- Hermawan, I., & Hidayah, N. (2023). Toxic masculinity dan tantangan kaum lelaki dalam masyarakat Indonesia modern. *Dimensia: Jurnal Kajian Sosiologi*, 12(2), 171–182. <https://doi.org/10.21831/dimensia.v12i2.60991>
- Jais, A. (2022). *Toxic Masculinity Represented in Sol Yurick's The Warriors* [Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang]. <http://etheses.uin-malang.ac.id/43238/1/18320076.pdf>
- Kirby, R. (2019). 'Toxic masculinity': the problem with men. *Trends in Urology & Men's Health*, 10(5), 4–4. <https://doi.org/10.1002/tre.709>
- McGlashan, M., & Mercer, J. (2023). Toxic Masculinity. In *Toxic Masculinity: Men, Meaning, and Digital Media*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003263883>
- Nurbani, T., & Adim, A. K. (2024). Representasi Toxic Masculinity dalam Film The Croods melalui Analisis Semiotika John Fiske. *Jurnal Ilmu Komunikasi UHO : Jurnal Penelitian Kajian Ilmu Sosial Dan Informasi*, 9(3), 730–746. <https://doi.org/DOI> : <http://dx.doi.org/10.52423/jikuho.v9i3.264>
- Prayoga, G. (2023). Critism of Toxic Masculinity in The Power Of The Dog Movie Based on Social Context. *Social Science Studies*, 3(6), 500–527. <https://doi.org/10.47153/sss36.6802023>
- Ramdani, M. F. F., Putri, A. V. I. C., & Wisesa, P. A. D. (2022). Realitas Toxic Masculinity di Masyarakat. *Prosiding Seminar Nasional Ilmu Ilmu Sosial (SNIIS)*, 230–235.
- Rimaîtè, G. (2024). *Exploring masculinity: a comparative study of male characters' representation in Disney animated films between 1990 and 2020* / [Kaunas University of Technology Faculty]. <https://epubl.ktu.edu/object/elaba:199538679/>
- Rivera, A., & Scholar, J. (2020). Traditional Masculinity. *Advances in Nursing Science*, 43(1), E1–E10. <https://doi.org/10.1097/ANS.0000000000000284>
- Sculos, B. W. (2023). The Profits of (the Critique of) Patriarchy: On Toxic Masculinity, Feminism, & Corporate Capitalism in the Barbie Movie. *Class, Race and Corporate Power*, 11(2). <https://digitalcommons.fiu.edu/classracecorporatpowerAvailableat:https://digitalcommons.fiu.edu/classracecorporatpower/vol11/iss2/6>
- Wicaksono, K. D. A., & Nur, F. A. (2023). Toxic Masculinity Tokoh Ken Pada Film Barbie Live Action 2023. *Journal of Contemporary Indonesian Art*, 9(2), 123–133. <https://doi.org/10.24821/jocia.v9i2.10975>
- Wijaya, W., & Nugroho, A. (2024). Unraveling the Man: Toxic Masculinity and Cowboy Culture in 'The Power of the Dog.' *JADEs Journal of Academia in English Education*, 5(1), 145–164. <https://doi.org/10.32505/jades.v5i1.8645>
- Yakali, D. (2024). "He is just Ken:" deconstructing hegemonic masculinity in Barbie (2023 Movie). *Frontiers in Sociology*, 9(April). <https://doi.org/10.3389/fsoc.2024.1320774>