Charles University
Faculty of Humanities

M.A. Program in Gender Studies

Pátkova 2137/5, 182 00, Praha 8 - Libeň

CHARLES UNIVERSITY

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES

Department of Gender Studies

Alicja Hansen

Queer Coding of Barbie Movies: Mattel's Attempt at Saving Barbie's Image.

Diploma Thesis

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Declaration on Honour

I declare that I wrote the thesis independently using the sources dutifully cited and listed in the bibliography. The thesis was not used to obtain a different or the same title.

I agree the diploma thesis will be published in the electronic library of the Faculty of Humanities of Charles University and can be used as a study text.

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Abstract
This thesis is a combination of queer analysis of selected Barbie movies done by the author, with the support of the relevant academic literature, and queer readings of those same movies done by people online. The text starts with an introduction, which gives the reader an overview of the subject and introduces the main research question: "Why does Barbie seem queer in the movies?" Then the thesis discusses the relevant theoretical literature and methods used in the study in the literature review and methodology sections respectively, which includes theories such as feminist and queer theory, but also touching on postfeminism and girl power. Further, the main portion of the study is the analysis, preceded by a preface, which consists of seven chapters, each one focusing on a separate movie. Lastly, all of the results of this study are explained in conclusion.

Key words
Queer reading, queer coding, textual poaching, LGBTQ+ fan communities, postfeminism, girl power, neoliberalism, Barbie media.

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Introduction

"And imagine life without the strife of an unfamiliar groom–"[1]

Sing Anneliese and Erika, holding hands during their "love at first sight" duet in a hit 2004 movie, *Barbie as the Princess and the Pauper*. They dream of escaping together and living their life how they want to, with no people depending on them and no societal expectations. They want to be their true selves, let an identity that they were hiding away all their life, to finally flourish.

Barbie is usually recognized simply as a fashion doll that has been a part of children's childhoods since the late 50s. From the first days on the market, she has been very controversial– her body was a topic of a heated discourse about sexualization of the young female body. Her influence, however, does not end there– she revolutionized the toy industry and became an inseparable part of the western culture and girlhood. Although so heavily criticized for her negative impact on young girls, Barbie has arguably always been a feminist icon to a certain extent. She has always been an independent young woman, practicing multiple different careers and dressing in a fashion forward, more liberated way. However, she has still remained heterosexual and had a partner through all those years– Ken. Although she broke up with him in 2004, he is still an inseparable part of the franchise, just like Barbie's sisters, lingering in the background, making sure that she has a potential partner out there, keeping her contained in the patriarchal frames of the feminine identity.

With Barbie having so much influence and being one of the bestselling toys for decades, it is only natural that with the evolution of feminism and female image, she would also be subjected to criticism and change in the 90s and 2000s with the raise of postfeminism and consecutively– girl power, especially since she already aligned heavily with the ideals preached by it. This process would slowly lead to "de-Babriefication" of Barbie, with Mattel's sales falling and the company trying to fix Barbie's "inappropriate" image that has been the main issue the public has had with her. This has been a concern of many parents for decades, as Barbie's adult woman body, often bold makeup and often skimpy or revealing clothing was considered to be unsuitable for a children's toy. For the past 20 years she had

[1] Barbie, "I Am a Girl Like You," *Genius Lyrics*, <https://genius.com/Barbie-i-am-a-girl-like-you-lyrics>. Accessed June 26th, 2023.

went through significant changes, from officially breaking up with Ken, getting a more inclusive body shapes line, to finally releasing the *Barbie* feature-length live action film, seemingly an attempt at reviving her old image, directed by Greta Gerwig, which is at the point of writing this thesis due to release in less than two months and which is not to be confused with the franchise of animated movies, which this thesis focuses on.

Branching into animated movies (which are the topic of this thesis) at the beginning of the 2000s, at the time of Barbie franchise popularity decline, was an opportunity to introduce the audience to their favorite character's personality, presenting her as mostly the opposite of how she was perceived by her critics. Instead of a vulgar sex symbol that gave little girls body image issues,[2] they got a calm, humble and feminine girl, who despite her purity and delicateness was still brave and was willing to fight with all evil in the name of friendship. The image change did not happen fast, but was rather gradual, as in 2001 in *Barbie in the Nutcracker*, Barbie's character was still constantly protected by a man and in fact– was the only main female character in the movie. Then, in 2002 in *Barbie as Rapunzel* and in 2003 in *Barbie of Swan Lake* she was slowly getting more independent. Enter 2004, a big year for Barbie, as she breaks up with Ken on Valentines day and also runs for president for the first time. The movie that came out that year, *Barbie as the Princess and the Pauper* started the real girl power revolution, giving Barbie a much more active role in the movie and most importantly– a female companion, a real soulmate, something she has never had before. Her sudden growing chemistry with female characters and steady dropping of one with males, has left many members of the LGBTQ+ community questioning her sexuality in recent years.

This is not the first time the Barbie franchise has been associated with queerness, though. Ken himself has been a subject of speculations about his sexuality for years too. From being accused of being just simply a little too feminine (which is understandable, since he is still a doll majorly catered to girls), to being straight up called Barbie's "gay bestie." The concerns about his sexual identity have been only intensifying since 1993, when Mattel released the Magic Earring Ken doll, which has been almost immediately nicknamed "Gay Ken."[3] His flamboyant looks, bleached blonde hair, mesh top and a revealing purple leather vest, paired with straight leg black pants and a pair of silver hoops, made him look more like

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[2] M.G. Lord, "Barbie: doll," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, last update: June 8th, 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Barbie>. Accessed June 23, 2023.

[3] James Greig, "Ken has always been gay," *Dazed*, June 16th, 2022. Available at: <https://www.dazeddigital.com/life-culture/article/56336/1/ken-has-always-been-gay-barbie-earring-magic-ryan-gosling>, last accessed June 20th, 2023.

a frequent gay bar visitor with fondness of kitsch 70s clothing, rather than a suitable partner for a blonde bombshell like Barbie. While this perception is homophobic and negatively stereotypes gay men, one has to remember that the society in the 90s was even more sexist than it is today. His appearances in Barbie digital media, since they have transitioned into the video industry, have varied from a lover, to a friend, a crush and a possibly closeted gay boyfriend of hers.

With the pandemic in 2020 keeping the majority of people at home, many have fallen into the loop of nostalgia. From *Twilight* to *Gossip Girl*, Zillenials have been overtaking the internet with memes, reference posts and fan compilation videos of their favorite early 2000s franchises. Barbie was not an exception here– many have rewatched the movies locked in their homes, with nothing better to do, and started to analyze them from a new, more modern perspective, especially focusing on queer readings.

It is crucial to introduce the importance of postfeminism and neoliberal politics here, as they heavily influenced the franchise. Neoliberalism was a movement, which raised in the late 20th century along with postfeminism. While neoliberal feminism focused more on the economy and labor law related politics regarding women's role in the western society,[4] postfeminism was more concerned with mass culture.[5] Both of those movements combined, heavily influenced the society and created major social changes. One of the groups most affected by them were teenage girls, with the raise of postfeminist girl power in the media. Postfeminism preaches women's independence and empowerment, while also encouraging them to be more sexually liberated and hot in order to still appeal to men.[6] Postfeminist girl power is a version of postfeminist movement suited for young girls. Instead of sexiness, it promotes femininity and pureness, showing them as the key components of empowerment. The narratives of girl power media show young girls that their independence is conditional, if they remain girly and virtuous, they will be able to be heroines of their own stories.[7]

From the 2020 onward, when the biggest spike of queer discourse around Barbie can be observed on the internet (due to the public's need to socialize and discuss different issues with each other, mixed with focusing on escapist, safe topics), she has been examined under

[4] Andrea Cornwall, et al, "Introduction: Reclaiming Feminism: Gender and Neoliberalism," *IDS Bulletin*. 39:6, 2008, 2.
[5] Emilie Zaslow, *Feminism, Inc.: Coming of Age in Girl Power Media Culture,* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 1-11.
[6] Rosalind Gill, "Post-postfeminism?: New Feminist Visibilities in Postfeminist Times," *Feminist Media Studies*, 2016, 620-622.
[7] Emilie Zaslow, *Feminism, Inc.: Coming of Age in Girl Power Media Culture,* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 1-11.

the queer lens. The LGBTQ+ community members largely started discussing different motifs and plots of the movies which matched the historical representations of queerness as well as common life experiences of queer individuals. The Barbie movies analyzed in this thesis depict a couple of selected titles, which due to their postfeminist and strong girl power ideals have been subjected to queer readings and allowed the members of the LGBTQ+ community to freely insert themselves into their narratives. This thesis is an attempt at collecting those interpretations and framing them in a more academic perspective, enriching the existing fruits of this discourse in my own analysis guided by the relevant academic literature on the subject, after receiving extensive education on the topic of queer analysis for the past five years.

When it comes to the structure of this thesis, it is important to introduce the research questions. The main question this thesis will tackle is "Why does Barbie appear queer in the movies?" There are also some side questions which this thesis will try to explore, such as "Why did the Barbie movies, even though they have quite obvious queer motifs, never cause a public controversy (like being accused by conservative media for spreading the gay agenda)?" Moreover, it will also try to further explain why the queer reading of those movies is possible in the first place. After introducing methodology and the relevant literature, the main body of this work will consist of seven analysis chapters, each devoted to one movie. Lastly, it will summarize all the most important points in the conclusion chapter.

Approaching the end of this chapter, I want to explain certain technicalities here, so that this thesis is clear to people not familiar with the Barbie movie franchise:

1. Although "Barbie" is the name of the doll line produced by Mattel and currently including all shapes, sizes and skin colors, Barbie as a character is only one person that has a specific look to her. She is always white, has blonde hair, blue eyes and plays the main character role in every movie from the animated franchise that came into existence in 2001 and is the topic of this thesis. In short, although all adolescent female characters in the franchise are played by Barbie dolls, there is only one actual Barbie in each movie.
2. Barbie will not necessarily go by her real name in the movie, in fact in most stories she plays a role of someone else, taking on a new identity, but still keeping her postfeminist girl power politics and personality.
3. While Barbie always has to play the main character, she does not have to be the only star of the film. There are instances, like *Barbie as the Princess and the Pauper* and *Barbie and the Diamond Castle*, where she shares the screen with another "Barbie." She will, however, never play the side character.
4. Other than Barbie's physical characteristics, she can also be recognized for her bravery and masculine personality traits, mixed with feminine presentation. She is the perfect postfeminist girl power heroine, while the other female lead

will exhibit signs of feminine weakness, either being scared, having doubts, lacking motivation, being superficial or needing saving due to her physical shortcomings. Barbie will be the true hero of the movie.

5. As mentioned before, the new *Barbie* movie, due to release in July of 2023, is not a part of this specific movie franchise. While the two are not directly connected, Barbie's and Ken's portrayal in that movie is heavily influenced by the cult following around the original franchise. Another factor is the formation of Barbie's character depicted in the movies and other digital media throughout the years.

6. This animated movie franchise is not the only piece of Barbie digital media. She has also starred as herself in a tv show and has her own YouTube channel. They have their own instances of queer coding, however, this thesis does not attempt to analyze them, because it cannot cover all of that material, and more importantly, Barbie's character is quite different in each type of media.

Positionality

In this portion I would like to introduce my positionality, in order to explain my own connection to the franchise, as well as why I decided to write my master's thesis on this topic. It is important to include my personal relationship to the media I am analyzing, especially from a feminist perspective, as my own background can influence this thesis. Presenting my positionality will show how I as a person, and a woman, am involved in the process of the analysis, making me an active participant in my research.

The first Barbie movie, *Barbie in the Nutcracker* came out in 2001, when I was just two years old. I was, therefore, going to be a part of the first generation of children who grew up consuming Barbie digital media from the beginning of their childhood. Soon after followed other movies which all were accompanied by dolls representing the main characters. This model of marketing was perfect for me and many other girls my age, as we were able to play with physical replicas of our favorite heroines and create our own stories based in a world which was already clearly established for us. In fact, this is exactly how I was introduced to the franchise, as in 2003 my parents have bought me the Odette Barbie, which came in a pack with a VHS tape of *Barbie of Swan Lake* that has just recently came out. This was my introduction to Barbie and her movie universe. I remember being stunned by the beautiful dancing scenes animations, which were modeled after actual professional ballet dancers, ensuring that even if the animation was not the best, the movements were still smooth and lifelike. For two years I have watched that movie many times and it was one of my favorites, with me playing pretend as Odette herself. Then my parents bought me the two previous movies on DVD and the Barbie movie craze was in full bloom, lasting for me till roughly 2008, when I was starting to be a bit too old for playing with dolls and my interests shifted. I consider those movies to be an important part of my childhood, much like other similar movies and tv shows at the time.

I definitely see myself to a certain extent to be a human product of postfeminist media influence, not only Barbie, but also other classic postfeminist, early 2000s titles for a similar demographic like *PowerPuff Girls, Winx Club, Trollz, Sabrina, Braceface, Kim Possible* and later for older girls, such as *Hannah Montana, The Cheetah Girls, High School Musical* and *That's so Raven*. I grew up watching the heroines from those shows and movies, and many of my core values in my childhood or even early teens were influenced by what I saw on the tv screen. Only later, when I grew up consuming other media, did my perspective started to

change. I eventually started my academic education and during my bachelor's degree, took interest in gender studies. This has in many ways changed my outlook on life and made me see the discrimination of minorities happening around me every day, with many of the oppressed that I have met, not even fully realizing the extent of what the Polish conservative society has been doing to them. At that time, I also went through my own struggles with sexuality and figuring out what and who am I attracted to, finding out through my journey that I had some really deeply ingrained prejudice which I was internalizing in my subconscious. This encouraged me to try and find the source of the thoughts and feelings I had. One was obvious– growing up in a predominantly Catholic, very conservative country. However, I knew this was not everything, as compared to the majority of Polish youth, I grew up in quite a liberal community, compared to the strict, traditional values others had to deal with. That is when I started examining digital media and their impact on the society and singular consumers. I wrote my bachelor's thesis on weaponization of sexuality and gender identity by right-wing LGBTQ+ members and how the rest of the community was reacting to it. Most importantly, I do not think my sexuality has anything to do with the validity of this study, as a queer person who did not receive academic education on queer readings of media and with no interest in media studies, would not be qualified to write such study on an academic level. I consider my extensive education and interest in the subject to be enough for my analysis to be valid, especially as it is supported by numerous academic works.

In my first semester of the gender studies masters program at Charles University in Prague, I had a conversation with a fellow student about nostalgic kids' media and it turned out that we used to both be huge Barbie movie franchise fans. With Barbie also regaining popularity on social media at that time, in the form of memes and funny edits, we decided to rewatch all of our favorite titles from the series, adding some newer titles that I was not familiar with before, on top of it. Upon rewatching the material, I have had the opportunity to see the movies from a different perspective. I started noticing the postfeminist motifs, as well as a lot of queerness and homoeroticism in them. As we were rewatching more movies, I have realized that there is enough material to write an entire thesis on the topic. For a few months it was a bit of a joke between me and my friends, as writing one's thesis about "queer representations in Barbie movies" sounds rather silly and not conventionally academic, but at the end of my first year of studies I have decided to actually make it reality. What pushed me the most, was seeing that the topic of specifically Barbie digital media, while the franchise was rather well known, was severely under-researched. I had to spend a lot of time gathering information about the movies and queer coding, to finally put the two together into

my own analysis and combine it with a few lengthier queer readings of those movies done by members of the LGBTQ+ community online. I anticipate more academic research similar to mine to be written in the upcoming years, as more and more people who grew up watching the movies are going to be entering the academia, therefore writing about the media of their childhood. However, as of now, I am excited to be one of the first to enter the academic discourse around queerness in Barbie media, with the findings in my thesis hopefully being helpful to scholars researching the subject in the future.

Methodology

This thesis will be largely focusing on the analysis of movies, therefore, content analysis is the appropriate approach to this research. It is a method which allows for analysis of large amounts of different types of texts, in an organized fashion. It is a message-centered methodology, focusing on the contents of the text.[8] This means that there is a certain message encoded in the given text and the audience is meant to decode it and interpret it. Because of that, there can be multiple interpretations of any given text. It is the right approach to this thesis, as it will allow for multiple interpretations of the movies chosen for this thesis and a comparison of them. According to Jim Macnamara, content analysis can be used to study a variety of different texts, including movies and has been used since the 1950s to analyze portrayals of women in the media, which this thesis tackles.[9] Moreover, the content analysis in this thesis is going to be done with a qualitative content analysis, which is a method that will allow for an in-depth understanding and interpretation of the motifs and complexities of the movies, thanks to its flexibility, which makes it easy to apply and mix with other methods or approaches. The variety of things content analysis makes possible to decipher and analyze, while also allowing to narrow or broaden or narrow the focus, makes it the best fit for this thesis. To further elaborate, this approach is best suitable here, as the thesis is dealing with a handful of selected movies and is focused on interpretation, rather than categorizing contents of the movies into specific groups and comparing the data.[10] Moreover, it mixes simple content analysis with queer coding and feminist theory, therefore the method used has to allow for that too.

This approach will be utilized by studying selected movies produced by Mattel starring Barbie, and then analyze them through a queer and neoliberal/postfeminist, girl power lens. The analysis will be grounded in queer reading done by the LGBTQ+ community through social media and other internet platforms, such as online media outlets and blogs, as well as my own reading, guided by the academic literature that I have read. The movies will be selected based on their release time, largely focusing on the beginning, when the approach to Barbie's portrayal changed the most. Those movies are also the best

[8] Jim Macnamara, "Media Content Analysis: Its Uses; Benefits and Best Practice Methodology," *Asia Pacific Public Journal*, 6(1): 2005, 1-2.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Hsiu-Fang Hsieh and Sarah E. Shannon, "Three Approaches to Qualitative Content Analysis," *Qualitative Health Research*, 15(9): 2005, 1-2.

known and most popular in the franchise, according to the IMDb ratings[11] as well as they are the most discussed ones in the LGBTQ+ fanbase, meaning they had the biggest influence over a generation of children of the 90s and 2000s and are the most often the topic of queer discourse. Among the movies analyzed in this thesis will be: *Barbie as the Princess and the Pauper*, *Barbie: Fairytopia*, *Barbie and the Magic of Pegasus*, *Barbie Fairytopia: Mermadia*, *Barbie and the Diamond Castle*, *Barbie and the Three Musketeers* and *Barbie Dolphin Magic*.

It is important to consider that since the study relies on an interpretation of media, it will not be the same for everyone. The way someone interprets media heavily depends on the background of the viewer, their knowledge, personality and current time period. Therefore, there are many possible interpretations of the same text. Signs, being one of the two key components, along with language, of they way humans comprehend and construct reality– can change meanings over time and be read by others differently, from what the author originally intended them to be.[12] In other words, this means that not everyone and not even every member of the LGBTQ+ community would read the movies in the same way, however, a certain group of people, which includes those members (some LGBTQ+ community members who grew up in the late 90s and early 2000s, watching Barbie movies), does. It is acknowledged that not everyone will come to the same conclusions while analyzing the movies themselves, even if they were using the same methods and theories to do so. The qualitative method is intentionally chosen here, as it assumes the author of the interpretation, to be an active participant in the analysis of the text, which I am, since I will be rewatching all the movies and while some of the scenes have been discussed on the internet before, I will also be adding my own analysis of other parts of those movies, with my own biases and perspectives.[13] This analysis is, therefore, presenting one of the layers of the interpretation of the Barbie movie franchise, kid's media in general and Mattel's sales, and should be considered in further studies of those topics.

As mentioned above, the thesis will be dealing with the topic of queerness and postfeminist/neoliberal politics. Because of that, it is important to incorporate a feminist approach to this research. According to Dustin Harp et al, a feminist approach in media

[11] Amanda Suarez, "Every Barbie Movie Ranked Worst to Best According to IMDb," *Screenrant,* April 6, 2022, <https://screenrant.com/every-barbie-movie-ranked-worst-best-according-imdb/>. Accessed June 20th, 2023.
[12] Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*, London: Penguin Books (1966), 49-51.
[13] Hsiu-Fang Hsieh and Sarah E. Shannon, "Three Approaches to Qualitative Content Analysis," *Qualitative Health Research*, 15(9): 2005, 1-2.

studies has been developed in order to focus on women's representation and gender relations in mass media.[14] Moreover, it does not only limit itself to the matter of simply giving women equal rights, but also deals with power dynamics, hierarchies, culture and voice. Feminist media scholars are dedicated to finding and breaking down the dualisms present in the patriarchal society's media, which result in women being perceived as inferior. Those dualisms, as Harp et al explain, are so ingrained in the mass's minds, that they do not see them on a regular basis and therefore take them as a default. Harp et al further argue that the differences and inequalities perpetuated in the media further solidify the patriarchal notion that men are the norm, while women are "the other," and that feminist media scholars attempt to expose that.[15] The feminist approach used in this thesis will first use an ontological perspective, which is that gender is socially constructed and performative. Moreover, certain behaviors, which do not fit the assigned gender of a person, break them out of the heteronormative frames, therefore, making them appear queer. Lastly, the neoliberal and postfeminist media, plays with the homoerotic depictions of women, never fully committing to assigning them a queer identity, because of the idea of compulsory heterosexuality and lesbian erasure. They imply the presumption that feminine presenting women cannot be homosexual, or even that any form of lesbian relationships are invalid and not serious.

Another important approach in this research is going to be queer coding, or rather decoding of the signs coded as queer. Koeun Kim, along with discussing queer-coded villains in the article titled "Queer-Coded Villains (And Why You Should Care)," also explains what the origins of queer coding are, and how it works. According to the author, queer coding as a practice is related to the 1920s and the Hays Production Code, which censored indecent behavior (such as sex, promiscuity and gayness) in movies in America. As LGBTQ+ people and their sexuality (back then labeled "sexual deviancy") was one of the acts which would fall under the ban, it was not allowed on the screen either. The directors have found many ways of hinting to the public, however, that the banned behaviors were still happening. An example of this could be showing two characters smoking, which implied they had sex. This included the queerness of some characters. Through a number of tropes, which were signs delivered to the audience, they were able to decode them and understand that a specific character was queer. Kim states that one of the first tropes of characters like

[14] Dustin Harp, et.al, *Feminist Approaches to Media Theory and Research,* Syracuse: Palgrave Macmillan (2018), 20.
[15] Dustin Harp, et.al, *Feminist Approaches to Media Theory and Research,* Syracuse: Palgrave Macmillan (2018), 20-22.

that was the "sissy."[16] Who was an effeminate man, at the same time sexless and used often as a comedic relief in movies. Queer tropes have been changing over time but were still clear to read to the audience, so there was no need to explicitly say that the character was queer, because it was already implied through a set of characteristics given to them.[17] Barbie movies are targeting children, therefore are very over exaggerated in most aspects, including gender expressions. Therefore, if a female character does not adhere to stereotypical, exaggerated femininity, which previously was the theme of Barbie franchise, they can be identified as queer. According to the author, queer coding reinforces the traditional gender roles by assigning certain characteristics, which are good or bad, to certain gender.[18] This is a useful concept in kid's media, which is already campy and over exaggerated, making it easy to identify. The thesis is going to criticize this idea using criticism of neoliberal and postfeminism and their commodification by the media, as both movements try to preserve the gender binary by only pretending to disrupt it.

Moreover, Sean Griffin in his book *Tinker Bells and Evil Queens: The Walt Disney Company from the Inside Out*, explains the importance of queer readings of texts. It is different from queer coding in the sense that queer reading can be done on texts which were not necessarily intentionally queer coded. He explains, they are enriching and diversifying the discourses around media, as well as provide new perspectives of analysis of media and recognize the queer influence on mass culture.[19] His ideas will be further developed in the literature review of this thesis. Both Griffin and Kim explain the importance and theory behind queer coding, queer erasure and queer readings. Those tools are going to be an important part of this research, which will allow for the analysis of Barbie through a queer lens and dissection of characters she portrays, as well as dynamics of the narratives she is a part of.

To summarize, this thesis is going to use qualitative content analysis with a feminist approach, especially focusing on feminist media studies, in order to provide an interpretation of selected Barbie movies. First, I will watch the movies looking for scenes or entire narratives which I see are queer coded/display postfeminist or neoliberal feminist ideology. Then, I will analyze the scenes accordingly using the literature provided in this section and literature review section. Further, I will explain how the motifs are related and influence

[16] Koeun Kim, "Queer-Coded Villains (And Why You Should Care)," *Dialogues@RU*, 2017, 158-159.
[17] Koeun Kim, "Queer-Coded Villains (And Why You Should Care)," *Dialogues@RU*, 2017, 157.
[18] Koeun Kim, "Queer-Coded Villains (And Why You Should Care)," *Dialogues@RU*, 2017, 161-163.
[19] Sean Griffin, *Tinker Bells and Evil Queens: The Walt Disney Company from the Inside Out,* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 50.

each other by comparing them to each other and setting them in the queer, neoliberal and postfeminist context. The thesis will analyze how postfeminist and neoliberal politics made Barbie appear queer and what are the results of this. There are some shortcomings of the methods this thesis will utilize, making the thesis partially subjective, as I will be also providing my analysis, which will be in some way influenced by my life experience and knowledge. This, however, will not make it any less relevant or valuable to the further discourse about Barbie, kid's media and marketing practices of toy companies and other entities which make children its target audience, as it will be still one of the very few existing academic works providing a queer reading of Barbie digital media.

Literature Review

This chapter introduces the most important theoretical literature, which will serve as the base and framework of this thesis. It divides the scholarly works into four categories: queer theory, queer media studies, feminist theory and Barbie movies. In the first section it discusses various texts, which will allow for understanding of queerness. The next part focuses on queer media analysis, explaining tropes of queerness and history of queer media. Then the chapter moves onto feminist theory, which provides socio-political context to Barbie and will be used to explain commodification of girl power. The last part focuses on how Barbie and other girl media apply postfeminist and neoliberal feminist ideals and what is the result of that. All of those texts will help explain why the LGBTQ+ community (particularly late Millennials and early Generation Z) read Barbie as a queer, or sexually ambiguous character in the movies. It is important to note that the scholars mentioned in this chapter, as well as their texts come from variety of different disciplines, including social sciences, anthropology, cultural and media studies. Most are from interdisciplinary backgrounds, which means that their theories can be applied to a variety of different fields, as long as there is a valuable connection there.

QUEER THEORY

In her work *Queer Theory: An Introduction,* Annamarie Jagose, explains "queer" as a multifaceted and always evolving term, in many respects it is in a state of constant development. She explains it to have many meanings and functions. For example, it can be a slur, or a derogatory term (used by homophobic individuals towards all members of LGBTQ+ community– "you filthy queer"), a theoretical model (used to explain queerness and how it operates and exists in all spheres of life) or a self-identification category (the Q in LGBTQ+, "I'm queer").[20] According to the text, queer theory disrupts the established models of sex, gender and sexuality in the modern society, dismantling the previous model of heterosexual and heteronormative identity, by breaking the heteronormative norms and the binary standards. As she explains, "queer" resists the normative frameworks of identity– mismatching sex, gender and desire, which so far have been strictly defined and intertwined by the society and its expectations.[21] Queerness allows for freedom of expression of a variety of different identities. A person can describe themselves as queer, as long as they actively

[20] Annamarie Jagose *Queer Theory: An Introduction*, (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 1.
[21] Annamarie Jagose *Queer Theory: An Introduction*, (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 3.

rebel against the heteronormative model of identity. This means that, for example, their gender identity and sex can match, but perhaps their sexuality and gender expression do not "fit" the rest. As long as there is the breaking of heteronormative rules involved, the person can say they are queer. Referring to Butler, Jagose explains how "queer" cannot ever be strictly defined, as it would be countering the idea of what it stands for.[22] Therefore, the definition is and will always remain fluid, however, it does have a stable component of being a counter movement to the heteronormative standards prevalent in patriarchal cultures.

Jagose also introduces how homosexuality itself was invented, by referencing Foucault, who explains that homosexuality is a modern concept, as it has never been considered a separate type of identity prior to the late 19th century, but rather a type of behavior some individuals were exhibiting. It was only when homosexuality was medicalized, was it conceptualized as its own identity.[23]

Finally, she gets to the problem of erasure of female sexuality, how the definition of homosexuality has not been applicable to women when the term was in its formative moments. Women's homosexual relationships were not considered a threat to the order of society, as women had a marginalized role and did not have rights to disrupt the integrity of the heteronormative society, unlike men did. Men, as the ones in power, created disruption if they became feminized, so the society was much more concerned with them, as they had the potential to introduce chaos to the established patriarchal order. Only later was women's sexuality finally recognized, due to progressing medicalization of women's same-sex sexual relationships, and they also started getting prosecuted for it. According to the article, when lesbian identity was finally recognized, it was not done through pathologisation of an existing type of identity, but rather creation of a new demonized one, which placed fear and stigma in the center of women's same-sex desire.[24]

Further explaining and elaborating on queerness, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's essay titled "Queer and Now" talks about her experience with breast cancer, details difficulties of living a queer identity and discusses academia, AIDS epidemic, economy and her personal love life. Most importantly for this thesis, however, she provides an explanation of queerness and her her understanding of it. The term for queerness, which she coined in this essay– "open mesh of possibilities," is one of her most well known quotes and is worth exploring. The essay explains that queerness is anything outside of the norms of sexual identity

[22] Annamarie Jagose *Queer Theory: An Introduction*, (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 1-2.
[23] Annamarie Jagose *Queer Theory: An Introduction*, (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 10-11
[24] Annamarie Jagose *Queer Theory: An Introduction,* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 13-15.

established by the patriarchal society. When explaining the heterosexual norm, Sedgwick lists how biological sex, gender, self-expression and sexuality of one own and the person's partner have to adhere to the binary standards. While in this model of society homosexual relationships are still acceptable, she notes that they still have to follow the heteronormative standard. For example, in a homosexual relationship, it is expected that one person plays the part of the "man" and another of a "woman." Therefore, between two women, one is supposed to be more masculine in her gender presentation (butch), more dominant and just play the role of a man in a patriarchal society. Moreover, the heteronormative model does not allow for mismatching of gender attributes, meaning that a masculine presenting woman cannot be submissive in bed and cannot date another masculine lesbian.[25] Everything relating to one's sexuality is determined by biology, which becomes a genesis of attraction and identity. Sedgwick also points out that normative understanding of sexuality implies that all people experience erotic attraction in the same way. This completely erases asexual spectrum of identities, as well as other types of sexual identities, like polygamy, but also implies that people perform their gender in a strictly defined way and are also exclusively attracted to the people who are embodying the opposite gender. That is where queerness comes in. She describes it, as mentioned before, as an "open mesh of possibilities," which allows for freedom of expression and mismatching of what is considered as components of normative sexual identities.[26] Therefore, compared to the heteronormative model that Sedgwick described before, queer is the exact opposite of it. Queer, breaks all of the norms, rejecting the strict, traditional models of identity, which constrain people. In queer theory, it is important to break out of the heteronormative construct of sexuality and instead embrace individuality. Living only in those strict frames of sexuality means that the person limits themselves to social norms, being conscious of their sexual identity in the eyes of the public. Therefore, queerness is a form of rebellion from the heteronormativity and compulsory heterosexuality, as well as the binary standard. When discussing the heteronormative frames each sexual identity has to fit into, Sedgwick mentions "masculinity and femininity" of one's own, or their partner.[27] This part boils down to the gender performance, which according to Butler, is an idea that gender is socially constructed and all gender specific behaviors and

[25] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Queer and Now," in *The Routledge Queer Studies Reader*, edited by Donald E. Hall, et al, (New York: Routledge, 2013), 6-7.
[26] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Queer and Now," in *The Routledge Queer Studies Reader*, edited by Donald E. Hall, et al, (New York: Routledge, 2013), 8.
[27] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Queer and Now," in *The Routledge Queer Studies Reader*, edited by Donald E. Hall, et al, (New York: Routledge, 2013), 7-8.

attributes, are created by the society as norms to follow, and have nothing to do with biology.[28] That means that individuals who subvert and challenge the binary, but also the gender roles, by not adhering to the broadly understood gender performance (sex, gender identity, sexuality, presentation, gender roles) which is expected of their gender or the gender they should perform while in a homosexual relationship– are queer. For example, a lesbian, who is a trans woman, who dresses very masculine, but is submissive in sexual relationships and acts feminine, would be considered queer, as her gender assigned at birth does not match her gender identity and she is a masculine presenting woman, who acts feminine. The components of her identity are mismatched from the gender performance spectrum.

In her essay "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality," Gayle S. Rubin starts explaining how sexuality and sex are a topic of public disputes and conflicts in the society. She further continues that sexuality has its own ways of oppressing people, categorizing them in a hierarchy and therefore, it is political.[29] She further explains, much like Jagose, that the late 19th century is an era where sexuality has been medicalized, which left the western society with negative sexual stigma such as masturbation being unhealthy. She also adds that censorships of literature has also been a way to politicize sex, as "indecent behavior" was not favored.[30] Rubin further explains the stigma around homosexual people that was prevalent in the society, saying that the middle of the 20th century brought the fear of the "sex offender," which from sexual predators and molesters evolved to be synonymous with "homosexual," highlighting how people considered the LGBTQ+ community as deviant. Moreover, she explains how the red scare around World War II further worsened the situation for the community, as it was the time of prosecution of both communists and queer people, linking the two events in the eyes of right-wing politics and therefore the public. Eventually in the 70s, the government was endorsing the narrative of homosexual people praying on children.[31]

Further in her work, Rubin moves onto discussing two approaches to the understanding of sexuality: essentialist and constructivist. The first assumes sexuality is out of is determined by biology and cannot change. The second has been developed by Foucault as a response to the former and it argues that sexuality is formed by the society and history,

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[28] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, (New York: Routledge, 1999), 173-174.
[29] Gayle S. Rubin, "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sex," from *Culture, Society and Sexualiy*, London: Routlegde (2006), 143.
[30] Gayle S. Rubin, "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sex," from *Culture, Society and Sexualiy*, London: Routlegde (2006), 143-144.
[31] Gayle S. Rubin, "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sex," from *Culture, Society and Sexualiy*, London: Routlegde (2006), 145-146.

rather than biology, also pointing out§ that new sexualities are and will be constantly produced, because the society is evolving.[32] Next, she discusses sex negativity and how the society stigmatizes it, paining it as dangerous. Further, she also, perhaps most importantly in the case of this thesis, talks about how the society hierarchies the sexualities in the "system of sexual values." According to Rubin, there is a pyramid that forms, with heterosexuals at the top and all "deviant sexualities" on the bottom. More heteronormative gay men and women are still barely there, while, according to the essay, people who Sedgwick described as queer and non-heteronormative are below even the bottom line. The outcasts that do not conform to the heterosexual reality, do not want to participate in gender roles and adhere to the societal norm occupy this level in the heterosexual majority's eyes. While homosexual individuals who do "play by the rules," basically forming heteronormative-like relationships with their same-sex partners are still (barely) accepted and manage to work within the frameworks of the patriarchal society, those who rebel against it, have to pay the price– ostracism. Rubin explains it as a balance between the "good" and "bad" sex. She elaborates that there needs to be some harmony and order for the hierarchy to work, therefore, values are very strict, so not to disrupt the order. They are picked based of religious and cultural beliefs present in the society.[33]

Later in her text, Rubin explains how women have been stripped of their sexuality, with lust being perceived as a feeling attributed to men. Because of that, women have not been the target audience of the porn industry, although they do take active part in creating it– as objects of desire. Rubin offers a new approach to women's oppression, further developing the idea of the sexuality hierarchy and introduces an intersectional approach to it. She argues that lesbian women, which is often overlooked, are not only oppressed because they are women, but also because they are queer. To prover her point, she points out that homosexual women experience many of the same hardships and discrimination as, for example, gay men. Rubin further explains why feminist theory does not fully suffice when it comes to the analysis of lesbian experience, because when sexuality comes into play, the conclusions can become irrelevant. Therefore, feminist theory needs to be incorporated into

[32] Gayle S. Rubin, "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sex," from *Culture, Society and Sexualiy*, London: Routlegde (2006), 149.
[33] Gayle S. Rubin, "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sex," from *Culture, Society and Sexualiy*, London: Routlegde (2006), 151-152.

the radical theory of sex, so both can together address the intersectional issues queer women face.[34]

Riki Wilchins, in the chapter "Derrida and the Politics of Meaning" of a book titled *Queer Theory, Gender Theory* explains how queer theory came to be, with Jaques Derrida's ideas of post-modernism. Further, she explains how Derrida has criticized language in the context of gender and queerness. He referred to language as a system of meanings, which is biased and has a great effect on gender, because it plays with powers and hierarchies. For an example, associating femininity with weakness and masculinity with strength. Moreover, Derrida argued that the main problem of language is that it names the common things, favoring the *Same* and ignoring the marginalized, unique and private things. Wilchins argues that the sense of self, gender and the body are the most private, therefore language will never be able to objectively name feelings and sensations related to them.[35] Further, she explains that because of those exclusionary practices of language, humans learn the meaning of things, by categorizing them as either the specific thing or the *Other*. She gives a simple example here, a person knows a chair is a chair, by knowing that other objects are not chairs. Everything that does not fit the strict definition of a chair, but is an object meant for sitting is not a chair, but a couch, stool, lounge and so on.[36]

The coding of gender and how specific signs can be interpreted by the masses, is also used in case of people, to determine if the individual is "the Other" or fits into the heteronormative frameworks of society. Wilchins explains that the same thing happens with gender. A woman is identified by everything that is not a woman. Same thing happens with men, creating those curated ideals of gender. The left-out individuals are the queer, other, non-categorized.[37] Further, the author explains that gender is greatly unstable, because the identification of everything that is not a man or a woman depends on the changes in society. Therefore, there is always a threat of a new exclusion happening, which results in the phenomenons such as "masculinity crisis," due to broadening of the definition of "woman," with women getting emancipated.[38] The gender characteristics allow for identification of genders, since, as mentioned above, there are strict frames created for each gender. However, when the person does not fit into all of them according to what they signify, they in a way

[34] Gayle S. Rubin, "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sex," from *Culture, Society and Sexualiy*, London: Routlegde (2006), 170-171.
[35] Riki Wilchins, *Queer Theory, Gender Theory: An Instant Primer,* (Los Angeles: Alyson Books, 2004), 34-36.
[36] Riki Wilchins, *Queer Theory, Gender Theory: An Instant Primer,* (Los Angeles: Alyson Books, 2004), 36.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid.

break out of the gender binary, not necessarily fitting into either of the two genders. Wilchins then poses a question of what the gender classifications of those individuals are. What is a masculine assigned female at birth person classified as? Are they a new type of gender?[39] They are definitely doing the gender in their own unique way, which is not considered a standard.

Being on the topic of otherness, there is another text, which will be very useful in this section, and that is *The Second Sex* by Simone de Beauvoir. While she is not a queer theorist, her ideas on otherness can be applied not only to women in patriarchal societies, but also other minorities that find themselves powerless and categorized as mystified and worse, including queer people. This book introduces the concept of "the Other," which positions women as the other gender, some foreign, undiscovered and different, mysterious entity in the patriarchal society. The second category citizen, who faces some sort of ostracism and discrimination for not being part of the "Self," which is the dominant majority in power. Specifically the part discussed here, explains how young girls, who exhibit masculine behaviors, can be perceived as "the Other" by their peers, while simultaneously not fitting in with boys. In the chapter titled "Childhood" in the 4th part of the book, Beauvoir talks about how women have an internal conflict within themselves between their autonomous self and their "outside" identity. Women are expected by society to adhere to certain rules and there is a lot of pressure on them. Because of that, they suppress their autonomy, give it up, in order to please the society and be objectified. Beauvoir even compares them to dolls, with no freedom, vulnerable to whatever is done to them by men. Doing so, women lose their subjectivity and ability to explore themselves, as well as regain this autonomy.[40]

Further, Beauvoir explains that women who are boyish and did not experience this high pressure of femininity in them in their formative years, are more likely to not encounter such problems and be much more independent.[41] Later, Beauvoir notes how girls while growing up, first are under the impression that women, in the form of their mothers, are the ones who are in power, since they mostly exercise authority over them. Later, when met with reality, they realize that men are really the ones in power, not women, which makes them seek options for saving from their underprivileged position.[42] One of those is fed to them

[39] Riki Wilchins, *Queer Theory, Gender Theory: An Instant Primer,* (Los Angeles: Alyson Books, 2004), 39.
[40] Simone de Beauvoir and H. M Parshley, *The Second Sex*. (London: J. Cape, 1956), 285.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Simone de Beauvoir and H. M Parshley, *The Second Sex*. (London: J. Cape, 1956), 286-287.

through a form of fairytales, where men save the princesses and make their lives worthy of living. They give their existence meaning, by saving them from different troubles. Before the princes, the princesses are miserable and have no authority over their fate, which seems to be doomed. The only option for them is to wait for a prince to save them.[43] Based on Beauvoir's theory of "the Other," it is possible to say that the person who does not adhere to those gender ideals, just like women cannot be perceived as equal to men and are antagonized for it, are going to be alienated and seen as different from the rest of members of their gender. Therefore, a girl who exhibits behaviors typically assigned to boys, like being independent and brave, will be seen as the outsider among other girls. She will not be accepted among her peers as one of them. Instead, she will be scrutinized for her otherness and the rest will avoid her.

Adrienne Rich in her paper "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," where she suggests that compulsory heterosexuality is leading to the erasure of lesbians, due to society viewing women as only having desire towards men and mostly in reproductive purposes. Such idea strips women of humanity and sexuality outside of men and renders all female relationships as non-sexual or non-romantic friendships.[44] The compulsory heterosexuality, forces women to pursue heterosexual relationships, because the society sees close romantic and sexual female relationships as invalid. Men are the only valid option for love and desire. Closeness between women is just a friendship, nothing more.[45] According to Rich this is the patriarchal tool, which is supposed to keep women powerless, as they see themselves as miserable without men.[46]

This is where she suggests the lesbian continuum. According to this theory, all women should embrace lesbianism and consider themselves as lesbians, in order to gain autonomy and build strong female bonds. Lesbianism is not only about sexual attraction, but general love and closeness between women, political and intellectual connections, which allows them to prioritize female relationships and simultaneously reject the constrains of compulsory heterosexuality. To be a lesbian means to be a feminist, as it frees women from the male influence. Lesbianism is the key to fight patriarchy, freeing women from the strict heterosexual bonds like gender roles and women's inferiority in the patriarchal society's order, which leads to their discrimination.[47] It does that by breaking women out of the cycle

[43] Simone de Beauvoir and H. M Parshley, *The Second Sex*. (London: J. Cape, 1956), 294.
[44] Adrienne Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," *Signs,* Vol 5, no. 4, 1980, 631-633.
[45] Adrienne Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," *Signs,* Vol 5, no. 4, 1980, 636.
[46] Adrienne Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," *Signs,* Vol 5, no. 4, 1980, 637-640.
[47] Adrienne Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," *Signs.* Vol 5, no. 4, 1980, 648-652.

of heterosexuality and allowing them for an alternative lifestyle without male influences and control in their lives. Moreover, disrupts the patriarchal power structures and offers alternative models of intimate relationships to women. In this sense, one can argue that, as Doty said, all close relationships between women, where men are seen as undesirable, can be considered a form of exercising this lesbian continuum feminism.

QUEER MEDIA ANALYSIS

Koeun Kim, in the article titled "Queer-Coded Villains (And Why You Should Care)" explains the queer villain trope of many stories, especially kid's movies and tv shows. She first explains what queer coding is and later on starts explaining the features of queer coded villains. Kim refers to the *Celluloid Closet* to give a brief overview of the history of queer cinema, which will later be discussed in this chapter and on an example of Him from *PowerPuff Girls* cartoon, she goes through the building of a queer villain character. The first characteristics she mentions are delicate features and smaller frame, feminine bodies, which contrast with the heroes of the stories. She points out that Him, who is also deemed to be the "most evil" villain of all in the show, despite using male pronouns, wears makeup and a tutu, as well as can be considered to be very glamorous and luxurious.[48] Therefore, the unusual (non-heteronormative) mixture of gender-coded features, which makes the character queer, is the basis for them to be read as unsettling and threatening to the viewer. Him is the dangerous "Other" and the unknown already at first glance.

Next important feature Kim mentions– is body language. As she explains, bodies and movements are even more important than clothes and looks, as some queer coded characters only reveal their queerness in motion. Kim states that femininity and feminine extravagance are the most common types of movement the queer characters practice. They're dramatic, quick and over exaggerated, compared to the fluidity of protagonists. Moreover, their walk and gender performance even in still positions is also feminine, like in the case of Him having the "limp-wrist" gesture. And lastly, even their voice can give them away, as they often speak in a higher tone of voice.[49] Kim notes one more important feature of queer characters: indecent sexual behavior. They pimp and groom their underlings to fight for them (to not get their "hands dirty") and drop hits to their sexuality: like Him licking Professor's neck while he is under his spell and saying things which allude to a deviant, sexual interest in him.[50] Kim points out that all of those behaviors are rooted in sexism and certain types of

[48] Koeun Kim, "Queer-Coded Villains (And Why You Should Care)," *Dialogues@RU*, 2017, 159.
[49] Koeun Kim, "Queer-Coded Villains (And Why You Should Care)," *Dialogues@RU*, 2017, 160.
[50] Ibid.

femininity have been used to paint those characters in a negative light. The traits are chosen intentionally to make a connection between sexual and gender deviancy and evilness.[51] However, a place where Barbie does not necessarily follow the classic narrative, is the fact that she does not entirely follow traditional gender roles,[52] because she's a product of postfeminist media, which will be further explored later.

McInroy, Zapcic and Beer explain in their essay titled "Online Fandom Communities as Network Counterpublics: LGBTQ+ Youths' Perceptions of Representation and Community Climate" how the queer online fandom communities use media available to them, to reinvent their narratives and create new ones which are more sexuality and gender identity inclusive. They explain that this happens due to small number and poor quality of readily available representations of them, for which they compensate by inserting their sexualities and gender identities into the existing plots..[53] The authors argue that the LGBTQ+ community youths might greatly benefit from OFCs, as they provide an accepting environment, which can positively impact them. Further, McInroy et.al explain that the representations of gay people are often offensive (negative stereotypes) or used to generate profit (gaystreaming and queerbaiting), rather than spread positive examples of diverse sexual and gender identities.[54]

As respondents of the study explained, fandom communities allow for creating new representations of queerness in the media, or simply highlight the already existing ones. Moreover, many voiced that the fan-made narratives made them feel accepted and reaffirmed in their identity. Further, the authors claim that participants see OFCs as counterpublics, as they challenge mass media narratives. The study also points out that up to 49% of fan activities was discussing the media.[55]

In the chapter "I love Laverne and Shirley: Lesbian Narratives, Queer Pleasures, and Television Sitcoms," from a book *Making Things Perfectly Queer: Interpreting Mass Culture* by Alexander Doty, the author explains how the mass audiences of shows about female relationships, become queer themselves, as they get heavily involved into their

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[51] Koeun Kim, "Queer-Coded Villains (And Why You Should Care)," *Dialogues@RU*, 2017, 171.
[52] Ibid.
[53] Lauren B. McInroy et.al, "Online Fandom Communities as Network Counterpublics: LGBTQ+ Youths' Perceptions of Representation and Community Climate," *Covergence: The International Journal or Research into New Media Technologies*, Vol. 28(3): 2022, 630.
[54] Lauren B. McInroy et.al, "Online Fandom Communities as Network Counterpublics: LGBTQ+ Youths' Perceptions of Representation and Community Climate," *Covergence: The International Journal or Research into New Media Technologies*, Vol. 28(3): 2022, 631-632.
[55] Lauren B. McInroy et.al, "Online Fandom Communities as Network Counterpublics: LGBTQ+ Youths' Perceptions of Representation and Community Climate," *Covergence: The International Journal or Research into New Media Technologies*, Vol. 28(3): 2022, 637.

lesbian and queer-like narratives. Because of strong connections felt by them towards their favorite characters and the bonds they have formed on the screen, they start seeing men as threats to the integrity of those relationships. Men become the undesirable part of the story, causing disruptions and chaos between female characters. Doty also links his ideas with the theory of lesbian continuum, which Adrienne Rich developed[56] and which have already been discussed in the previous part of this chapter. Doty explains how the reading of certain characters and behaviors in the media can be interpreted as queer, depending on the viewer. For example, a straight woman who has not been educated in any way in queer readings of texts as well as queer tropes, might see the relationships on screen as platonic, while a queer woman, or one educated about queer media analysis, will be able to see the homoerotic dimension, because they either relate to the representation, or are familiar enough with it, to be able to spot it. Doty himself explains that he reads some of the relationships as lesbian, when others might see them as homosocial, strictly platonic close female friendships. Still, the media often suggests that the nature of the relationships between the characters are in some way filled with lesbian desire or lesbian bonding.[57] He explains how the shows he discusses establish their female characters as straight, which then allows them to go very far with the lesbian-like narratives, creating family-imitating bonds between the characters, who then form women-only households, without the threat of controversy. Doty also acknowledges how this can be homophobic in nature, as those narratives present any type of queer closeness as "just friendship.[58]" This is especially true for women's relationships, as women's queerness is very often marginalized, misrepresented and ignored in the media.

The Celluloid Closet is a movie which discusses queer representations in the media, specifically movies, over the course of history of cinema. It begins with the various screenwriters and actors explaining that queer audiences are heavily underrepresented in the media, for a long time completely erased, while it is something they craved. Richard Dyer, a film historian explains then that a person's identity is not only shaped within theirselves, but also is created and influenced by the culture they are surrounded by. Sexuality and gender are formed by culture. When movies show queerness in a negative light, people start to believe that this is what homosexuality looks like in real life.[59] After this short introduction

[56] Alexander Doty, *Making Things Perfectly Queer: Interpreting Mass Culture.* (London: University of Minnesota Press (1993), 40-42.
[57] Alexander Doty, *Making Things Perfectly Queer: Interpreting Mass Culture*, (London: University of Minnesota Press (1993), 43.
[58] Alexander Doty, *Making Things Perfectly Queer: Interpreting Mass Culture*, (London: University of Minnesota Press (1993), 44.
[59] Rob Epstein and Jeffrey Friedman et al, *The Celluloid Closet,* USA, 1995. Timestamp: (6:22-7:39).

to the impact of cultural representations on people's daily lives, the movie moves onto explaining queer tropes which were used in movies. It first introduces the character of a sissy, who practically lacked sexuality, existing between the two sexes and therefore was accepted on screen. Their sexuality was never discussed, and they were seen as homosexual only subliminally. The sissy was a joke,which can pretty much be summed up to simple comedic trope of a man dressed as a woman. This stands in contrast with a woman dressed as a man, who was seen as desirable by both sexes– entrancing and sensual.[60]

In the 1920s, the church and American government created the Hays Code, which started as a self-censorship for movie makers, to get rid of “indecent behavior” in movies. Both claimed that the code was a precaution implemented in order to fight and prevent moral degeneration of society. Over time, the catholic church introduced further restrictions, which resulted in severe changes introduced in the narratives of the movies produced at the time. However, this did not erase homosexuality from screen, but rather transformed its depiction, so that people would recognize queerness as something negative. Therefore, the queer characters were mainly shown as villains.[61] In the times of the Hays Code, hints for queerness in movies could be as settle as even a male character using floral perfume and be accompanied by oriental music, like in the Maltese Falcon.[62] A woman dressed masculine, a woman being stunned by other woman's beauty, or two men showing each other their guns, where all the queer sexual hints were hidden in the subtext and the audience had to read between the lines.[63]

Later on, a trope of "burry your gays" was introduced and it meant that queer characters had to be tragic and have tragic endings. Plato in *Rebel Without a Cause* as well as Martha in *The Children's Hour* are examples of characters which had to die. Martha and others like her were characterized by depression, guilt and being suicidal, which as the movie points out, heavily influenced queer people's perception of themselves and their actions. Seeing characters who suppress their sexuality on screen, makes the audience see this as the only way of surviving, as once they were found out or indulged in their desires, they would die. Such depictions nurture fear and causes internalized homophobia. It teaches people that living their true identity is wrong and will have horrible consequences, therefore nobody should do it and avoid their desires.[64]

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[60] Rob Epstein and Jeffrey Friedman et al, *The Celluloid Closet,* USA, 1995. Timestamp: (8:02-12:37).
[61] Rob Epstein and Jeffrey Friedman et al, *The Celluloid Closet,* USA, 1995. Timestamp: (13:54-19:36).
[62] Rob Epstein and Jeffrey Friedman et al, *The Celluloid Closet,* USA, 1995. Timestamp: (19:46-20:17).
[63] Rob Epstein and Jeffrey Friedman et al, *The Celluloid Closet,* USA, 1995. Timestamp: (32:41-34:05).
[64] Rob Epstein and Jeffrey Friedman et al, *The Celluloid Closet,* USA, 1995. Timestamp: (48:28-1:00:00).

Lastly, the movie explains how due to toxic masculinity, a love depiction of two women on screen is more acceptable than two men. Women's intimacy does not have the burden of having to appear strong, therefore it is much more digestible to the audiences, without the same amount of outrage men would face. Moreover, women are not taken seriously in their homosexuality. Their same-sex relationships are seen as experimental instead, therefore, men do not have to feel threatened by them. Because of this, depictions of women's intimacy are all seen under innocent sisterhood, while closeness between men is a threat to patriarchy.[65]

FEMINIST THEORY: POSTFEMINISM AND NEOLIBERAL FEMINISM

For the feminist theory, as well as theoretical framework and tools for analysis of girlhood and girl power, this thesis will largely refer to a book by Emily Zaslow, *Feminism, Inc: Coming of Age in Girl Power Media Culture*, which discusses the raise of girl power movement within neoliberal feminism. Zaslow explains the origin of the movement, its purpose and main goals, as well as how it influences the girls and women consuming the media featuring this motif. From the 1990s, there was a raise in girl power media, which was combining both femininity and feminist ideals. It was supposed to mix empowerment and classic, traditional femininity, allowing girls to both fulfill their roles assigned by the patriarchal society, like being a daughter, mother and wife, as well as achieve their professional goals, so important for the growing capitalistic economy. It also seemingly allowed them to regain autonomy over their sexuality. The movement was further popularized by the band Spice Girls, which was the ideal representation of it, where the singers were feminine and sexy, but not for men's pleasure, rather their own empowerment. The singers were hot, sexy, powerful and free, which perfectly embodies who the postfeminist woman is supposed to be.

Further, Zaslow explains how girl power media has been a concern of girl studies, arguing that it cannot be challenging to the patriarchal and hegemonic norms, as it is an artificially created movement by the capitalist society, supposed to bring monetary profits to big corporations. They found that the easiest way of attracting profitable female consumers, was through combining powerful messages with femininity. Such combination was the most appealing and marketable to the masses, as it would both seemingly satisfy the more conservative people with the strong emphasis on traditional femininity, as well as more

[65] Rob Epstein and Jeffrey Friedman et al, *The Celluloid Closet,* USA, 1995. Timestamp: (1:20:51-1:23:20).

liberal individuals who craved strong and powerful female representations in the media, especially for the younger generation of women to look up to.

Zaslow argues that girl power, shows that independence is conditional. A girl can be powerful and have a moderate amount of autonomy, challenge the gender roles by not needing a man, however, she needs to conform to femininity. Otherwise, according to postfeminist ideology, she is just an ugly, weird outsider, disliked by everyone. A woman, or girl, cannot be too challenging or too controversial. She has to remain feminine, otherwise, what else differentiates her from men and boys? Gils do not want to be boys, after all, they want to be strong girls, with all the sex appeal and femininity they can have. Most importantly, Zaslow argues that girl power is rooted in neoliberal ideology, which seems like it is allowing girls to break from the strict frames of the patriarchal society, but in reality, it has many shortcomings (like only promoting shallow narratives of empowerment, or not breaking the binary standard) which perpetuate the existing ideals of femininity and girlhood, rather than disrupt them.[66]

Continuing with the neoliberal influence, the article by Andrea Cornwall, Jasmine Gideon and Kalpana Wilson, titled "Introduction: Reclaiming Feminism: Gender and Neoliberalism," explains the relationship between feminist ideals and neoliberalism, which is a political movement that became popular in the late 20th century and mainly favored less governmental involvement in the economy (the idea of "free-market" economy). According to the article, the neoliberal movement has shifted its focus onto women, who were an attractive labor force for the capitalist society. However, first women needed more empowerment to be able to join the workforce. This came in the form of neoliberal politicians passing legislations that made it easier for women to work, while simultaneously lowering the working conditions and wages.[67] This way, married women started working, feeling like they are gaining a new form of autonomy, many of them never had before, while still being dependent on men. This was due to the imbalance in the "work-life balance" concept, because most women never stopped doing the domestic labor alone.In other words, the neoliberal politics grounded women in their domestic roles, simply just adding a new layer of responsibility to their daily lives, in the form of paid labor. Men on the other hand, remained in an unchanged position, while they gained another provider in their household.

[66] Emilie Zaslow, *Feminism, Inc.: Coming of Age in Girl Power Media Culture,* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 1-11.
[67] Andrea Cornwall, et al, "Introduction: Reclaiming Feminism: Gender and Neoliberalism," *IDS Bulletin*. 39:6, 2008, 2.

With all those intense responsibilities falling onto women, they became trapped in their roles, assigned to them by the patriarchal society.[68]

Rosalind Gill has attempted to explain what postfeminism is in her article "Post-postfeminism?: New Feminist Visibilities in Postfeminist Times," especially in the context of media studies. Postfeminism is a concept which deals with critique and shortcomings of the feminist movement, while still acknowledging its positive achievements. Gill acknowledges there are a lot of disagreements as to what is the exact meaning and definition of the term. She explains that the majority of misunderstanding and lack of consensus on the meaning of postfeminism, comes from the fact that there is uncertainty to the "post" part of the word. She says that some scholars interpret it as simply the death of feminism, therefore deeming it irrelevant in the current resurgence of popularity of feminism. However, according to Gill, scholars who study postfeminist media culture do not see postfeminism that way, but rather take it into account when analyzing texts, while also attacking it. Some argue that postfeminism should be understood as transnational culture, not just a western phenomenon, since it can be seen in other parts of the world too, where feminism had a completely different history from the West. Most importantly, Gill argues that postfeminism should be an object of analysis, not a perspective through which one analyzes things. She describes it as an analytical category, which as she argues, people should not be skeptical about when it comes to the resurgence of feminism, as this does not mean anti-feminist movements disappeared. Further, she explains that being a feminist media scholar means to engage with contradictions, which postfeminism as a critical concept does.[69] For an example, it promotes independence and women's liberation, but also pressures women into being "hot" and sexual in order to appeal to men.

Another text further explaining neoliberalism and its relationship with feminism, as well as postfeminism, is an article titled "Postfeminism, Popular Feminism and Neoliberal Feminism? Sarah Banet-Weiser, Rosalind Gill and Catherine Rottenberg in Conversation." In the first part of the article, Gill and Rottenberg explain what neoliberal feminism and postfeminism are. Gill argues that postfeminism is a product of the 1990s and it is a response to the contradictions in women's representations. According to her, postfeminism solidifies the differences between sexes and excuses this as just a result of natural differences, which

[68] Andrea Cornwall, et al, "Introduction: Reclaiming Feminism: Gender and Neoliberalism," *IDS Bulletin*. 39:6, 2008, 5-6.
[69] Rosalind Gill, "Post-postfeminism?: New Feminist Visibilities in Postfeminist Times," *Feminist Media Studies*, 2016, 620-622.

stem from for example– biology.[70] By this logic, a man is stronger than a woman, so he will be doing more physically intensive labor, like lifting weights. Similarly, a woman has a uterus and capacity to produce milk for a baby, so she is naturally the primary carer of her child in the early years of its life.

Further, she explains that the time of rise of postfeminism in the western world was prominent for the presence of extreme contradictions in the society, regarding women and girls. On one hand, there was a strong pressure on promoting empowerment in the form of girl power for girls, and sexual and economic freedom for women. On the other hand, there was a growing problem with misogyny, which saw women as inferior to men, but in a new, much more openly hateful way. Lastly, Gill also notes that postfeminism is largely regarded as a middle-class, heterosexual and white women's movement of the western societies,[71] as they are the privileged group, which has mostly benefited from feminist movements, leaving women from other social classes, racial and ethnic minorities and sexualities behind. However, she contests it in her other work, discussed above, suggesting that some people argue postfeminism can be observed in other, non-western societies too.[72]

Further in the text, moving onto Rottenberg's part, she explains that the main difference in neoliberalism and postfeminism is that the former acknowledges the gender inequality, while ignoring socio-economic and cultural influences on individual lives. Unfortunately, she does not provide a deeper explanation of that, however, from Gill's explanation, which allows for comparing of the two– one can assume that postfeminism focuses more on sexual liberation and seemingly breaking gender stereotypes (promoting women's independence in the form of girl power, rather than continue to tell them they need men to survive), while keeping the patriarchal order in a more hidden and less obvious way. According to Rottenberg, neoliberalism needs certain components of liberal feminism in order to keep the patriarchal hierarchy in the society and not disrupt the domestic (private) and public frames of life. Neoliberal feminism is a type of feminism which puts women in the center of the neoliberal politics. It makes them both motivated to work and earn money, while simultaneously shaming them into still doing most of the domestic housework. It maintains the role of women as caregivers and mothers, while incorporating them into the

[70] Sarah Banet-Weiser, et al, "Postfeminism, Popular Feminism and Neoliberal Feminism? Sarah Banet-Weiser, Rosalind Gill and Catherine Rottenberg in Conversation," 4.
[71] Sarah Banet-Weiser, et al, "Postfeminism, Popular Feminism and Neoliberal Feminism? Sarah Banet-Weiser, Rosalind Gill and Catherine Rottenberg in Conversation," 4-6.
[72] Rosalind Gill, "Post-postfeminism?: New Feminist Visibilities in Postfeminist Times," *Feminist Media Studies*, 2016, 621.

workforce and making them contribute into the economy. Both postfeminism and neoliberal feminism allow the capitalist and neoliberal political system, to not take the responsibility for women's struggles, simultaneously acknowledging them and profiting off them, while disregarding the intersectional approach and years of studies about gender inequalities deeply ingrained in the western society. They instead suggest that it is all up to women and their choices. Women are positioned as the masters of their fate, in a sense– being fed the new, feminized version of the American dream, where everything depends on the individual's ambitions and will to improve their situation.[73]

BARBIE MOVIES AND GIRL MEDIA

Emma Jane's article "'No Bos Olib'– On the Gynocentrism and Sparkly Separatism of the Barbie Movies," is a work which is important to consider in the context of this study. Her work poses a question about what she calls a "sparkly little gender separatism," cultivated by the Barbie franchise. Drawing on Stuart Hall's idea about role reversal when it comes to racism, Jane argues that Barbie movies took a simplistic strategy to feminist politics– reversal of gender roles, rather than overthrowing of them. Looking at it from her perspective, Barbie movies try to push the girl power narrative at the expense of men, this way reinforcing the binary division of gender. She suggests that because of that, Barbie franchise only seems empowering and revolutionary, while in reality it replicates the patriarchal society system in the movies, just reversing the oppressed group.[74] In other words, it does not in any way really empower girls, but rather is just repackaged patriarchy, which is supposed to be consumable in the rise of girl power media. Such strategy does not promote any real positive values of acceptance, empowerment and equality, but rather feminizes men and masculinizes women in the movies. It does so, in order to assign them the same negative traits associated with feminine gender expressions, in result solidifying the gender binary.

Building on the argument of girl power media not challenging the status quo, Cary Elza's essay "What Dreams are Made of: Hillary Duff and the Illusion of Girl Power" confirms Jane's argument, stating that girl power characters of the early 2000s encourage girls to gain autonomy and empowerment by coming to terms with the reality of patriarchal society, rather than challenging it. The author argues that young girls are bombarded with

[73] Sarah Banet-Weiser, et al, "Postfeminism, Popular Feminism and Neoliberal Feminism? Sarah Banet-Weiser, Rosalind Gill and Catherine Rottenberg in Conversation," *Sage Publications,* 21:1, 2020, 7-8.
[74] Emma Jane, "'No Bos Olib'– On the Gynocentrism and Sparkly Separatism of the Barbie Movies," *Fusion Journal,* No. 2, 2013.

messages about feminism and empowerment, without actually being empowered by the media. They are rather taught to be obedient and work within the limits imposed on them, being taught to be blind to inequalities. Elza discusses the girl power phenomenon among young girl's media on the example of Hillary Duff and a fictional character she plays, Lizzie McGuire. The author points out many features of girl power feminism that are supposed to appeal to more conservative audiences– relatability, which came in the form of her innocence, friendliness and at the same time endurance to face daily life problems of a teenager.[75]

Elza is also yet another author who mentions postfeminism and neoliberalism, saying that the postfeminist "girl power" in teen and tween media of the 2000s created a space where there is no need for social change, because the female characters portrayed there, are already empowered enough. In other words, there is no room for growth and feminist ideals are taken for granted. She identifies her understanding of postfeminism by citing Astrid Henry: "post-feminism … signals both failure and success, both an anti-feminist critique of the misguidedness of feminism and a pro-feminist nod to feminism's victories."[76] From this quote, it can be understood that postfeminism is a complexed term, which both criticizes and praises feminism on different achievement and approaches. Moreover, she explains that it also puts an emphasis on individuality, but that the ideas of empowerment in the media become a substitute for actual feminism, because they are just empty promises and image creation, rather than actually implementing those values in real life.[77]

To summarize, this chapter examines the relevant theoretical literature, which was used in this thesis, as well as some academic texts on Barbie. First, the queer theory allows for understanding of the concept of queerness and recognizing it. Next, feminist theory focuses on the results of neoliberal and postfeminist influence on culture and media and is used as a tool to understand commodification of girl power by companies such as Mattel. Lastly, queer media analysis will focus on queer tropes and motifs in media, help recognize and explain them.

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[75] Cary Elza, "What Dreams are Made of: Hillary Duff and the Illusion of Girl Power," In *Disney Channel Tween Programming: Essays on Shows from Lizzie McGuire to Andi Mack.* Edited by Christopher E. Bell. Jefferson: McFarland & Company Inc. Publications, 2020, 42.
[76] Cary Elza, "What Dreams are Made of: Hillary Duff and the Illusion of Girl Power," In *Disney Channel Tween Programming: Essays on Shows from Lizzie McGuire to Andi Mack.* Edited by Christopher E. Bell. Jefferson: McFarland & Company Inc. Publications, 2020, 44.
[77] Cary Elza, "What Dreams are Made of: Hillary Duff and the Illusion of Girl Power," In *Disney Channel Tween Programming: Essays on Shows from Lizzie McGuire to Andi Mack.* Edited by Christopher E. Bell. Jefferson: McFarland & Company Inc. Publications, 2020, 44-45.

Preface to the Analysis Section

Before I start the analysis section of this thesis, I wanted to explain why do queer fans even attempt queer readings of the popular media. While this topic has been partially tackled in *The Celluloid Closet* documentary, where it was explained that due to lack of representation of queerness in the media, LGBTQ+ people are forced to read between the lines and find themselves portrayed in the subtext.[78] This work is quite dated though, as it was released in 1995. What I want to focus on here is explaining this concept, but in the case of online fan communities, which is a phenomenon of only the last one or two decades, as well as the main way the queer readings used in this thesis have been found.

Queer readings of popular culture media are common among online fan communities, of which LGBTQ+ community specifically is known for creating fan-fiction and discussing possible queer ships within the fandom. Still in today's world, there is unfortunately not enough representations of non-heteronormativity, so queer individuals have the need to insert themselves into the already existing narratives, in order to compensate for the lack of examples of their own sexualities around them.[79]

During the 2020 pandemic people were looking for light-hearted, nostalgic and relatable type of content to watch and consume. Barbie movies were one of the examples of such media, so they easily became the target of interest to the "chronically online" Zillenials, who grew up watching them. This sparked the wave of queer readings of Barbie media within the queer part of the fandom too. The reason why it did not happen quicker is due to the fact that Barbie's media is quite new and the children who grew up watching its evolution, are only now old enough to be able to discuss and properly analyze them. With the Zillenials growing up and now sharing their experiences and thoughts online, Barbie queer analysis is booming more than ever. As McInroy et.al explain in their essay, inclusive fan communities can have a positive impact on queer youth,[80] which mixed with the comfort of nostalgic kids' media, created an exceptionally safe space for queer Barbie fans during the pandemic and the stress of the following war in Ukraine.

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[78] Rob Epstein and Jeffrey Friedman et al, *The Celluloid Closet,* USA, 1995. Timestamp: (6:22-7:39).
[79] Lauren B. McInroy et.al, "Online Fandom Communities as Network Counterpublics: LGBTQ+ Youths' Perceptions of Representation and Community Climate," *Covergence: The International Journal or Research into New Media Technologies*, Vol. 28(3): 2022, 630.
[80] Lauren B. McInroy et.al, "Online Fandom Communities as Network Counterpublics: LGBTQ+ Youths' Perceptions of Representation and Community Climate," *Covergence: The International Journal or Research into New Media Technologies*, Vol. 28(3): 2022, 631-632 and 637.

When it comes to the question why is Barbie specifically so easy to read as queer, it is related to something I have mentioned in the introduction of this thesis. For long established Barbie fans, even including Zillenials, who grew up in the Barbie movies era of the Barbie franchise, Barbie the doll line has always portrayed her as a heterosexual woman. As Barbie has become an inseparable part of popular culture, her portrayals have passed just the strategical marketing done by Mattel. She became one of the symbols of mainstream pop culture, to the point that practically everyone knows about her, but depending on where they heard of her, their image of her will be different. For children of late 90s and early 2000s, Barbie has two faces: the gentle girl power heroine from the movies and the contrasting sex symbol of the 90s heroin chic, as well as an antithesis to the body positivity movement of the 2000s the feminist movement has warned everyone about. Because of that and the fact that people and especially children are not educated enough to decode and analyze the hidden message in the media, Barbie is generally perceived as heterosexual. Barbie and Ken are a blueprint for a stereotypical white, heterosexual romance, just like princes and princesses. Everyone knows that they are the perfect picture couple, with multiple references to them in other pop culture media. Moreover, while Ken was never the ideal of masculinity, as he was always rather flamboyant, Barbie herself has always been perceived as the heteronormative feminine ideal. It is important to also remember that Ken got created later than her, as an addition to the line, so that she would be more solidly grounded in the patriarchal heteronormative society and stop the comments that Barbie with her big chest, bleached blonde hair and slender figure was "whorish." After all, how can she be promiscuous, if she has one steady partner.

It is exactly her "straight as a ruler" image that makes her appear queer to the LGBTQ+ audiences, as well as others educated on the subject. The contrast of the two personas, one in the doll form, much more well known Barbie the "Ken's girlfriend," and the "I do not care about boys, the female friendship is the most important value in a girls life" Barbie, is so drastic that it feels rather odd. Because of that, it becomes quite easy to see the movie franchise Barbie, as entering her "out of the closet and progressive" era. The great influence the postfeminist movement had on Barbie's franchise, as mentioned here before, resulted consequently in men in the stories becoming less important and more emasculated, as they started playing the roles of women in traditional tales, while Barbie's characters were the heroes.[81] Barbie became relatable, humble, innocent and friendly, much

[81] Emma Jane, "'No Bos Olib'– On the Gynocentrism and Sparkly Separatism of the Barbie Movies," *Fusion Journal,* No. 2, 2013.

like other children's media icons, such as Lizzie McGuire.[82] On top of those characteristics, she was also brave, devoted, fearless, smart and strong. In order to further feminize her, her image was specifically curated. She can be seen majority of the time in pink (the color traditionally assigned to girls and considered to be very girly), with her golden locks hanging to her waist, a very pretty, cute face and perfect figure (small waist, larger breasts, long legs and proportional hips).

With less romantic narratives between Barbie and Ken and the contrasting increase of female friendships, Barbie's image strikingly changed. From a long established monogamous heterosexual woman, always with a man by her side, she became a sweet girl who is deeply devoted to her best friends, while paying no mind to boys. With this change, once one compares her before and after, they can come to the conclusion that her intense relationships with women are a substitute for heterosexual relationships, especially considering that most of the movies follow traditional fairytale structures, where typically a man saves a woman. In postfeminist girl power narratives a woman can be a hero (which Barbie is), but she has to be feminine, so she does not disturb the patriarchal status quo too much.

Now I will move onto the analysis section of the thesis. It will consist of seven chapters, each discussing one movie from the franchise, sometimes drawing connections between the movies. Each analysis is a mix of my own academic reading and queer readings done by queer fans online. The thesis has been enriched by pictures, to make the specific scenes and characters easier to understand for the reader. Sometimes they are frames taken directly from the movies, other times pictures from online forums with relevant text on them. Each picture has a description further proving the point argued in the paragraph they are attached to. The summary of all findings will be provided in the conclusion.

[82] Cary Elza, "What Dreams are Made of: Hillary Duff and the Illusion of Girl Power," In *Disney Channel Tween Programming: Essays on Shows from Lizzie McGuire to Andi Mack.* Edited by Christopher E. Bell. Jefferson: McFarland & Company Inc. Publications, 2020, 42.

1. Barbie as the Princess and the Pauper

The first movie this thesis is going to tackle is one of the first productions of Mattel and widely considered to be the most popular one, according to IMDb ratings and many fan pages and articles. In 2004 the themes of queerness and girl power are only starting to be introduced into the franchise, therefore the story still follows a more heteronormative narrative. This means that the movie has much more obvious patriarchal motifs (like heterosexual marriage), while still trying to promote girlhood, which in theory, the two stand in opposition to each other. However, as Elza argues, girl power is a tool used by postfeminism to actually strengthen patriarchy, by showing female characters who do not need to fight for empowerment, because they already have it.[83] This production also introduces the first "misfit" motif in the Barbie movie franchise, which later became a recurring theme in their productions and are an important part of the reason why the movies have been a subject of queer reading. Nonetheless, the movie still has a lot of queer coded scenes and characters in it, as well as shows themes of girl power, both of which have been heavily discussed among the LGBTQ+ community– especially those born in the 90s and early 2000s, who grew up watching it.

Barbie as the Princess and the Pauper is a story about two strikingly similar looking girls born at the same time in one kingdom. However much they look alike, the two lead completely different lives– where Anneliese, played by Barbie, is a princess in a lavish castle, her daily activities including private tutoring and trying on dresses; Erika is a poor seamstress, exploited by her employer, to whom she is trying to pay off her parents' debt. As it turns out, both crave a change in their lives. In this fairytale film, the viewers are met with a narrative, which I read as a story about breaking social norms, self discovery and the power of female friendship. In its first minutes, the movie tries to deliver a clear message to the viewers, in the first duet song between the two female leads– even though their circumstances are different, at heart they are just the same. In the song "Free" both are singing about different duties they have in their daily lives, which they are tired of. As the YouTube creator, Alexander Avila, points out in his video essay titled “Overanalyzing the Barbie Movies with Queer Marxist Theory,” Anneliese mentions that she wishes to marry

[83] Cary Elza, “What Dreams are Made of: Hillary Duff and the Illusion of Girl Power,” In *Disney Channel Tween Programming: Essays on Shows from Lizzie McGuire to Andi Mack.* Edited by Christopher E. Bell. Jefferson: McFarland & Company Inc. Publications, 2020, 44.

who she chooses, which was coincidentally similar to the demands of the gay marriage movement that started to grow in 2004, just a few months prior to the release of the movie.[84] While it might be completely accidental, it does certainly support the idea of freedom of choice in marriage, which was a big topic for the gay community in the US at the time. The song has parts where girls sing the same lyrics, indicating that even though they do not know each other, they are more similar than one might think. This is a basis for an empowering and uniting message for a young girl audience, which promotes the idea of girlhood, unity and mutual support. It shows that no matter their background, all girls struggle just the same and have similar goals.[85] Even though it seems rather ridiculous and unrealistic that a princess and a poor seamstress could relate to each other and see each other as equals, the movie tries to push this narrative very hard. At the same time, I think that this song can be seen as the basis of queer interpretation of the two characters, as the girls sing about not fitting into the roles assigned to them (which could be an analogy for gender roles and sexuality) and due to this, they are outcasts who somehow have the same secret struggles.

The song "I'm Just a Girl Like You," which is considered to be the most famous from the movie, is claimed to be charged with queer energy. As Alexander Avila states in his video essay, in this scene the girls metaphorically bond through their queerness.[86] It is the first time in the movie, when Erika and Anneliese meet each other in person. Katherine Lynch's and Carli Silva's "Barbie Movies Ranked According to How Gay They Made Me," is a collaborative work article between the two authors and combines a list of Barbie movies, which the two think are the most charged with homoerotic energy. In this work they describe this scene as a love at first sight moment.[87] I would like to elaborate on this: struck by their similar appearance, except for different colors of their hair, they start singing a song about their lives and how they are not happy, because they cannot do what they want, due to their responsibilities. They quickly realize that despite their backgrounds, they are just the same and actually have similar struggles.[88] Their similar appearance can be interpreted as a metaphor for them being the lost soulmates, the two halves of one, hence their similarity.

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[84] Alexander Avila, "Overanalyzing the Barbie Movies with Queer Marxist Theory," Jan 21, 2022, (27:34-28:33). Available at: <https://youtu.be/ZION_-IsJro>, accessed June 7th, 2023.
[85] William Lau, *Barbie as the Princess and the Pauper*, (Mainframe Entertainment and Mattel Entertainment, 2004). Timestamp: 02:40-06:00.
[86] Alexander Avila, "Overanalyzing the Barbie Movies with Queer Marxist Theory," Jan 21, 2022, (32:35-32:55). Available at: <https://youtu.be/ZION_-IsJro>, accessed June 7th, 2023.
[87] Katherine Lynch and Carly Silva, "Barbie Movies Ranked According to How Gay They Made Me," *Her Campus*, March 9th, 2021. Available at: <https://www.hercampus.com/school/emmanuel/barbie-movies-ranked-according-how-gay-they-made-me/>, accessed June 7th, 2023.
[88] William Lau, *Barbie as the Princess and the Pauper*, (Mainframe Entertainment and Mattel Entertainment, 2004). Timestamp: 18:11-20:55.

Since both girls feel like they do not fit into their environments and feel restricted in their daily lives, it can be interpreted as two kindred souls finally finding each other and bonding to a major extent over their shared queer experience. It it normal for people from minority groups to bond with each other over one part of the identity they all share. It can be even seen with certain religions or people of specific nationalities living away from their own countries, because they migrated somewhere they are discriminated against. For example, in a country where certain nationality is discriminated against, people of that nationality will be more interested to find other people from their country, who understand their struggle, compared to if they were not experiencing oppression there. In a strict society, where everyone is expected to fulfill their duty and live the life someone else has decided for them, similarly, queer people struggle with the expectation of them living a certain lifestyle, against social norms– which is not what they want for themselves.

The characters have an internal need to revolt against the societal expectations forced upon them. As Erika sings "I'm just like you, you're just like me– there's somewhere else we'd rather be" (18:57-) and "You'd never think that it was so, but now I've met you and I know. It's plain as day, sure as the sky is blue– that I am a girl like you,"[89](-19:29) if one assumes that "princess" and "pauper" are metaphors for the girls respective identities, them needing to break out of the norms and wanting to do something else with their lives, is queering those identities. As noticed by Lynch and Silva, the girls even call the place they want to escape "somewhere that's ours" and one "and imagine life without the strife of an unfamiliar groom," which can be interpreted as wishing to find a place together and without men, further solidifying the queer narrative.[90] Moreover, the girls talk about keeping their responsibilities, which trap them in lives that they are not happy with. They have the need to rebel, which as Sedgwick explained in her essay, queer is a practice of actively revolting against against heteronormative social norms.[91] In this case, Anneliese is revolting against her fate as a princess, wanting to marry her tutor and not get involved with a prince of another kingdom to save her people from poverty. Erika, on the other hand, rebels against her boss (by trying to sing on the street and dreaming of becoming a singer one day) and her social class– by falling in love with a prince and befriending a princess. Just as Wilchins said in

[89] William Lau, *Barbie as the Princess and the Pauper*, (Mainframe Entertainment and Mattel Entertainment, 2004). Timestamp: 18:57-19:29.
[90] Katherine Lynch and Carly Silva, "Barbie Movies Ranked According to How Gay They Made Me," *Her Campus*, March 9th, 2021. Available at: <https://www.hercampus.com/school/emmanuel/barbie-movies-ranked-according-how-gay-they-made-me/>, accessed June 7th, 2023.
[91] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Queer and Now," in *The Routledge Queer Studies Reader*, edited by Donald E. Hall, et al, (New York: Routledge, 2013), 8.

her work, people recognize what things are, by learning what they are not. Everything that does not fit the categories accepted by the society is the other, or in case of gender– queer.[92] Therefore, Anneliese and Erika, by not conforming to the society they live in, can be read as queer, with the first girl being interested in science and leading a more simple life with no royal duties, while the other dreaming of a life of fame, singing on a grand stage.

Their body language at the moment they first meet is also important to pay attention to. The girls reveal their faces, which are the physical manifestation of how similar they are, to each other when they get close and surprised start singing the song. They dance close to each other, hold hands and get very close, considering their status differences. More interestingly, it is Erika who first establishes physical contact between the two, touching Anneliese on her saying and making the first observation about their similarities. The girls look excited and look each other deeply in the eyes, being happy that they finally found a soulmate, who understands them. It is important to note that this is the only movie where Barbie's friend is the hero saving her, not the other way around. From their very first encounter it can be observed that Erika is braver and more outgoing, as well as has more compassion for others and their struggles.

When Preminger, the story's villain, kidnaps Anneliese, Julian– her tutor, sends for Erika and asks her to pretend to be a princess, so that the villain reveals where he hid the princess. Erika is at first reluctant, as she points out that pretending to be royalty could get her into prison or even worse, as it is a great crime. She quickly changes her mind, however, when she realizes Anneliese is in a great danger. She decides that she will help her saying "a girl like me,"[93] a lyric from their song in which they realize they are very similar to each other, not only when it comes to uncanny visual resemblance, but most importantly– goals and dreams. This scene shows how deeply connected and devoted to each other the two girls are, even after just such a brief encounter. Erika feels obligated to help her soulmate friend, even if it means risking her own life and facing very serious consequences. It is quite an intense feeling to have about someone only met once, this further confirms the queer reading of their relationship more like love at first sight, rather than simple friendship. This moment in the movie shows how intense the girls feel for each other or at least Erika feels for Anneliese. It looks as if the girls felt an incredibly strong connection, which is probably rather unrealistic also, as soon as they realized that they are so similar. There are no "best

[92] Riki Wilchins, *Queer Theory, Gender Theory: An Instant Primer,* (Los Angeles: Alyson Books, 2004), 36.
[93] William Lau, *Barbie as the Princess and the Pauper*, (Mainframe Entertainment and Mattel Entertainment, 2004). Timestamp: 31:49-31:53.

friends at first sight" really, as the concept of friendship is usually built over time, however love, or at least a crush and infatuation has been a motif present in love stories for centuries.

Preminger is another example of a queer coded character in the movie. He fits the more typical and obvious queer coded villain image. Narcissistic, self-absorbed and vain, Preminger only cares about a fortune and power. In his first song titled "How Can I Refuse?" (8:00- He pulls out a big golden mirror from his coat, to look at himself and indulge in his fantasies– a sign of great vanity. Later, his two male henchmen can be briefly seen polishing his shoes and filing his nails. Interestingly enough, even though princess Anneliese is very beautiful, he does not in any way express a desire towards her. In fact, he blatantly admits that he only sees her as his ticket to the royal title, lifestyle and power, saying "And by marrying the princess I get all that I desire, like a moat, an ermine coat and palace views,"[94] as well as calling her a "nitwit" who "can kiss his shoes."[95] Preminger's queerness does not only show through his words, but also, as Kim points out is common for those characters– the way of dressing and gestures.[96] He wears a fancy gray wig, much fuller and more elegant than other men working at the castle. He also wears a knee length purple coat, which again stands out from the usual white, blue or red worn by men in the movie. Moreover, he has an abundance of rings on his fingers, all with extravagant stones. Lastly, he can often be seen over exaggerating his reactions, either letting out a shriek or pretending to faint. He also walks softly, like a ballet dancer, carefully taking each step, which are carried by his thin and bony ballerina body.

Figure 1: Smoothie Bar, "Funny Pix," Pinterest

Preminger standing on one leg, mid dance, with his other leg above his head, leaning in to propose to the sad queen. His body language is queer, as his body moves like a ballet dancer, displaying his crotch covered only by green tights. He looks predatory, as he approached a vulnerable queen, who shows she is uncomfortable both with her body language and facial expression.

[94] William Lau, *Barbie as the Princess and the Pauper*, (Mainframe Entertainment and Mattel Entertainment, 2004). Timestamp: 08:44-08:50.
[95] William Lau, *Barbie as the Princess and the Pauper*, (Mainframe Entertainment and Mattel Entertainment, 2004). Timestamp: 10:14-10:16.
[96] Koeun Kim, "Queer-Coded Villains (And Why You Should Care)," *Dialogues@RU*, 2017, 159-160.

All of those features prove that Preminger greatly cares about his appearance in a way, which other men at the castle do not. He also stands out from them in the way his body is presented, contrasting usually overweight or well-built men surrounding him. In fact, his outfit is more similar to the queen's or Anneliese's than other men in the movie, when it comes to how elaborate it is. Even in the moment when he is briefly supposed to marry the queen, she stays in her regular purple gown, while he dresses in white, like a bride would, which further emphasizes his femininity. Moreover, he even spends time admiring himself in his new outfit in the mirror, calling himself "lovely."[97] Preminger is a classic queer villain, whom Kim describes in her essay. On an example of Him from *PowerPuff Girls*, she points out all features of queer villains of children's shows. Over exaggerated, feminine and campy– those are telling characteristics they all have, including Preminger. Such features make them appear sexual and odd, even deviant, due to the lack of gender conformity they exhibit. There is something unnatural about them and this makes them unsettling in a different way than if they were simply evil and committing evil acts.[98]

In the end of the movie, both girls break social norms, as Anneliese marries Julian, who has no royal title. Erika on the other hand marries king Dominick, which as a poor seamstress, she is not supposed to do either. Both girls follow their dreams, rather than pre-determined destiny, decided for them by others. Both heroines follow their heart. In the end, they have a double wedding and even leave the castle where it takes place, together in a double carriage. But the movie first shows two girls getting ready for the wedding together, both in white dresses and then walking down the aisle together, to only later show them stand with the princes at the altar.

Figure 3: Barbiemoviestrivia, Tumblr,

Anneliese and Erika getting dressed for their double wedding. They are holding hands, which makes them look like they are getting ready to marry each other.

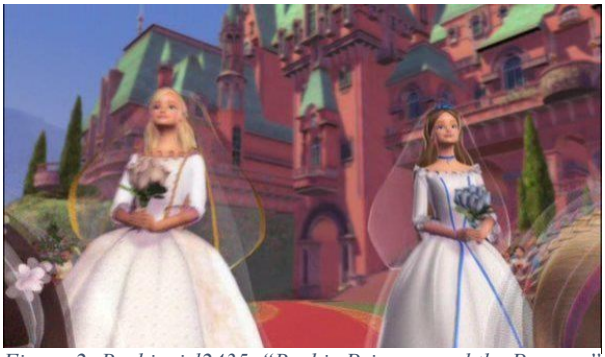

Figure 2: Barbiegirl2435, "Barbie Princess and the Pauper," Fanpop,

Anneliese and Erika walking down the aisle together, looking like they are about to marry each other in a holy lesbian union.

[97] William Lau, *Barbie as the Princess and the Pauper*, (Mainframe Entertainment and Mattel Entertainment, 2004). Timestamp: 1:07:26-1:07:34.
[98] Koeun Kim, "Queer-Coded Villains (And Why You Should Care)," *Dialogues@RU*, 2017, 160.

I have also noticed that the girls stand next to each other in the middle of the altar and their respective male partners stand on the sides, more like witnesses, rather than grooms. This can be read as a hint that the two girls have not only married the princes, but also symbolically married each other, through this double ceremony, which implies that they are going to be linked by this experience together and that their lives will never be the same, as they will always have each other.

Figure 4: Fanpop, "Barbie Movies Image: Barbie Princess and the Pauper," Pinterest,

Anneliese and Erika standing at the altar facing each other. Their male partners stand on their sides, which makes them look more like witnesses, than grooms. The priest is in the middle, ready to start the ceremony. The girls look like they are about to marry each other.

Avila seconds this conclusion, as he notes that the final scene looks like it suggests a polyamorous relationship between the two couples. Further, he points out that the girls do not challenge the heteronormative status quo,[99] which I agree with. The movie shows that there is space for breaking out of the norm, but only if it is within the rules of the patriarchal society, which expects women to be feminine and men to be masculine, especially in their presentation. Adopting masculine characteristics by women, like bravery and leadership skills, does not make a woman manly, as long as she presents traditionally feminine and does not outwardly reject the idea of heterosexuality, either by making herself unattractive or clearly announcing her homosexual interests. Both girls are very traditionally feminine. They both wear dresses through the whole movie, have long hair that they wear down and are thin, have big breasts and conventionally pretty faces. Of course it is important to note that that conventional beauty is white and young, as the movie does not feature any characters of color and the girls are 16 years old.

[99] Alexander Avila, "Overanalyzing the Barbie Movies with Queer Marxist Theory," Jan 21, 2022, (32:58-34:50). Available at: <https://youtu.be/ZION_-IsJro>, accessed June 7th, 2023.

2. Barbie and the Magic of Pegasus

The movie *Barbie and the Magic of Pegasus* tells a story of princess Annika, played by Barbie, whose family and subjects have been turned into stone by an evil warlock named Wenlock, who wants to capture and marry Annika. At the kingdom's party when Wenlock threatens the princess, she is suddenly saved by a pegasus who turns out to be her sister, Brietta, who has fallen a victim of the same sorcerer 16 years earlier. The girls set out on an adventure to save their kingdom and undo the spell.

Although not a misfit, Annika is a rebellious and brave young girl. She is known for disobeying her overprotective parents, who are trying to keep her safe from Wenlock her entire life. As Sedgwick explains in her essay, queerness is linked to an act of rebellion. While queer people rebel against the heteronormative rules of the patriarchal, Annika rebels against the rules her parents created to protect her from the situations created by the patriarchal society, which nurtures objectification of women. When her kingdom is threatened, she does not hesitate to set out on a dangerous journey in order to save everyone. She quickly grows very attached to her sister, whom she had never met before. Over their journey, she never loses her cool and tries to keep everyone positive and focused. She is independent and when they meet Aiden, a handsome young man who is trying to pay off his gambling debt, she is completely unfazed by him and his charm. Even though he tries to act heroic towards her at times and undermines her in the beginning, Annika always finds a way to save herself and others, showing him that she can be independent. She is always proving how brave she is, not afraid to put herself in danger for others, even when nobody believes she will succeed.

When her bear cub, Shiver, is threatened with being eaten by an ogre, even though Aiden tells Annika there is no point in saving her, because they will not be able to succeed, the princess goes to save her furry friend without hesitation. Not with muscle strength, but with her intelligence, she is able to save herself and Shiver. In fact, the movie shows that physical strength, associated with masculinity, is not enough to be invincible. Even though the ogre is very strong and can easily kill the princess, as she is trapped in a giant pot, she manages to trick him, by undermining his strength. The ogre feels comfortable showing off and not paying attention to his prey, as he does not see them as a threat. After all, they are so much smaller then him, how could they possibly hurt him or escape? Annika manages to make the ogre clear their escape route, as she tells him he is definitely not strong enough to

kick the door out or chain himself to a pillar in his house and break the chain with one breath. When the ogre traps himself, the princess and her bear easily escape using a hair ribbon to climb out of the pot and walk out.[100] The ogre is simply outsmarted. This gives a message to the young female audience that they are just as capable of saving themselves and being equal to much stronger men, by using their intellect and flair. This is a tool to preserve Annika's femininity, but still empower her. Thanks to that, she can stay beautiful and not get her hands dirty, but be a brave hero. The preservation of femininity is very important for postfeminism and girl power, according to Zaslow.[101] Moreover, she emasculates Ollie by showing him how easy it is for her to escape without even using force on him, showing that Barbie movies feminize men.[102]

Annika and Brietta, prove time and time again to be a great duo, figuring out the riddle of the magic wand they have to build and which will allow them to break Wenlock's spell. They are a great team and help each other all the time, utilizing each other's strengths. Meanwhile, although Aiden has been invited by Annika to join them because of his blacksmith skills, only later he becomes a part of their team and their friend. The movie pushes the message about women's independence and strength, with no need for a man. Aiden is not really useful to the girls, he travels with them, because they are looking for the same thing, but he has to prove himself to be worthy of their friendship. Especially Annika does not grant him this privilege right away, she is fully confident in her survival skills and knows she can manage to do everything on her own, which even further solidifies her position as the story's main hero.

Brietta represents a more classic model of femininity. As Annika's older sister, she feels responsible for her. Moreover, she feels like a burden to her parents in her new form (after she gets transformed into a pegasus) and decides to run away in order to protect their feelings. However, she saves her sister right away when she is in danger and also sacrifices her crown, a gift from the cloud queen, in order to save the kingdom. She professes her deep love and sense of responsibility she feels towards her subjects,[103] even though she has not really been considered a part of the royalty for 16 years and any proof of her existence has

[100] Greg Richardson, *Barbie and the Magic of Pegasus*, (Mainframe Entertainment, Mattel Entertainment, 2005). Timestamp: 27:50-32:09.
[101] Emilie Zaslow, *Feminism, Inc.: Coming of Age in Girl Power Media Culture,* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 10.
[102] Emma Jane, "'No Bos Olib'– On the Gynocentrism and Sparkly Separatism of the Barbie Movies," *Fusion Journal,* No. 2, 2013.
[103] Greg Richardson, *Barbie and the Magic of Pegasus*, (Mainframe Entertainment, Mattel Entertainment, 2005). Timestamp: 50:44-51:03.

been wiped from the kingdom, so Annika would never find out about her. Still, Biretta represents this female martyrology, sacrificing herself for others and caring for them sort of like a mother. She is also more timid and less brave than Annika, however, she is willing to support her and protect her in case of danger. She plays a role of a female partner of a brave man, who is so in love with him that she follows him everywhere, no matter how dangerous it gets. Annika is the masculine counterpart here.

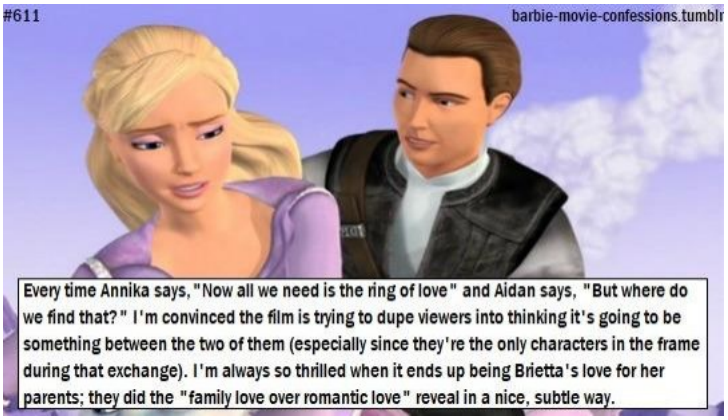

Figure 5: Barbie-movie-confesions, Tumblr,

Worried Annika flying on a pegasus with Aiden. The text on the bottom of the picture explains how the movie prioritizes familial bonds and royal duty over the romantic narrative between the two.

The love of two sisters proves to be the strongest bond, as they manage to break the curse Brietta is under, with the help of the magic wand and Annika wishing for her sister to be human again "from the bottom of her heart."[104] Showing that female bonds are the strongest force possible, breaking even the unbreakable curses cast by men. It is important to note that the spell was broken by Annika's pure intentions, meaning that when she is exhibiting feminine traits like purity, she can have strength. This all is an exhibition of Zaslow's argument about feminine autonomy and power being conditional.[105]

[104] Greg Richardson, *Barbie and the Magic of Pegasus*, (Mainframe Entertainment, Mattel Entertainment, 2005). Timestamp: 52:00-52:52.
[105] Emilie Zaslow, *Feminism, Inc.: Coming of Age in Girl Power Media Culture,* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 10-11.

Figure 6: Barbie-movie-confesions, Tumblr,

A picture of Anna and Elsa (protagonist sisters from the Disney movie Frozen) hugging next to a picture of Annika and Brietta hugging. The comment on the bottom praises the movies for showing that sisterly, or women's love is stronger than a romantic feeling for a man.

Once the wand is ready, Brietta is human again and the girls get sent pegasus' from the cloud kingdom, Barbie, or Annika, turns to Aiden and awkwardly tells him they should probably say their goodbyes. It is very clear that Aiden is in love with Annika at this point and the scene is supposed to show that she feels the same about him without saying it, however, it also can be read differently. From a different perspective, I think that the scene can be also read as Annika telling Aiden that she does not need him anymore and now she is more than capable to do the rest by herself, therefore unusually rejecting her male interest's advantages, which can be seen as queer, but also be considered as showing her independence, which aligns the character with the postfeminist ideals. Aiden even reasons with her, tries to be protective and voices his concern for how she will manage to deal with Wenlock, which she dismisses right away, with confidence.[106]

Unfortunately, soon after the girls split from Aiden, Wenlock finds them and attacks them. He causes the two girls to crash in the snow, as their pegasus' lose orientation. Annika gets up right away, rushing toward her sister. When the sorcerer walks towards them, Annika says "you hurt her" with hatred in her eyes.[107] She immediately grabs the wand, ready to take her revenge, but it does not want to work. Annika screams for it to destroy Wenlock, but the wand does not want to listen. Being driven by anger this time, Annika does not have pure and good intentions like last time. She is too masculine for the wand to do what she wants. Once the female hero loses her femininity, she is powerless.

[106] Greg Richardson, *Barbie and the Magic of Pegasus*, (Mainframe Entertainment, Mattel Entertainment, 2005). Timestamp: 54:00-54:24.
[107] Greg Richardson, *Barbie and the Magic of Pegasus*, (Mainframe Entertainment, Mattel Entertainment, 2005). Timestamp: 55:13-56:19.

Figure 7: Barbie-movie-confesions, Tumblr,

Annika trying to destroy Wenlock with the Wand of Light. The text attached to the picture praises the heroine for being ruthless and ready to commit murder to avenge her sister.

Interestingly, Annika is saved by Aiden, who suddenly appears out of nowhere, and not Brietta, who seems quite helpless seeing her sister buried under a pile of snow that Wenlock brought down on her. This motif brings the story back to the classic, heteronormative fairytale reality and tones down the girl power themes. Brietta does not seem too worried about her sister, once again showing her passivity. She is not a hero, because she does not know how to rebel and be queer like Annika or simply does not want to. It is a man's job to save women, so she lets Aiden do it, while she stands terrified beside him. Once Annika wakes up, she immediately is ready to get back into her fight with Wenlock. On the contrary, Brietta seems to have already given up. Her sister, however, is persistent and insists they go get the wand of light back and save her kingdom. When they get to Wenlock's den, she and Aiden are the ones who go inside to face the wizard, while Brietta stays outside. This shows that Annika and Aiden grew to see each other as equals and can fight together, with neither being seen as "the hero," ultimately taking that title away from the other.

Figure 8: Barbie-movie-confesions, Tumblr,

Brietta helplessly waiting for Aiden to save Annika. The text attached to the picture points out that some viewers see Brietta's lack of action as negative and weak, which unfortunately makes sense, as her character is not supposed to be a female hero. She is playing the female role, so she cannot take action, she is supposed to be helpless.

Wenlock is not a classic queer villain like Preminger, as he is much more masculine than him. He seems to more so represent the sexist patriarchal society, as he has multiple wives, but is never satisfied with them, so he turns them into ogres and treats them like servants. He wants a perfect wife, but is unable to find one, because he sees women as objects, only caring about his needs and not theirs. He does not want love, but adoration. He claims that all women are annoying and he hates his wives. He also is walking quite masculine, fights all the fights on his own and does not display feminine body language, which are all important queer villain characteristics that Kim talks about in her essay.[108] That might be why some fans often say he is the scariest villain in the Barbie franchise. He is the embodiment of the patriarchal society, which objectifies women all the time.

Figure 9: Barbie-movie-confesions, Tumblr,

Wenlock grinning. The text on the bottom expresses that Wenlock was one of the scariest villains, perhaps because he is one of the least queer ones, which means there is not much to make fun of about him, he's just an embodiment of evil masculinity.

[108] Koeun Kim, "Queer-Coded Villains (And Why You Should Care)," *Dialogues@RU*, 2017, 159-160.

Aiden evolves to be Wenlock's opposite. He first tries to be Annika's hero, making her feel like he is so much more capable and knowledgable than her, because he is a man. However, over time, he starts to see how brave and independent she really is and sees her as an equal to himself. When they are skating together in Wenlock's den, they show healthy rivalry, challenging each other in a playful way. They are teammates, not a hero and a victim. Aiden is no longer trying to protect Annika for the sake of impressing her, but rather working towards the same goal. When Wenlock's griffin attacks them, he fights him off, because he happens to have a sword and send her alone to the villains hideout, where he knows she will eventually face him with nobody to save her, but herself. So he decides to split with his equal teammate and hope she can do her part and they win by helping each other. This does not exactly align with Jane's findings about the Barbie movie franchise feminizing men,[109] but one might argue it is a start of that, considering this is a degradation from his traditionally assumed masculine hero position.

In the end, Annika marries Aiden and the two end up dancing in the skies. This is again a heteronormative ending to the story, however, is it softened by the fact that the two are equal and Aiden openly admits that Annika changed him and helped him grow as a person. This is probably the most equal heterosexual relationship out of all the movies discussed in this thesis. Even though Annika does end up with Aiden, it is still clear that he acknowledges her queerness and in fact, that is the reason for his love for her and the source of his respect.

Annika and Brietta's bond is a great example of Rich's theory of lesbian continuum, where the lesbian love is the ultimate power able to beat the patriarchy.[110] Here, it is based on the example of sisterhood, but the truth is that the girls have never met each other before. It is their friendship and a bond they form along the way that allows them to beat Wenlock, not their familial ties. Annika is Brietta's hero, she saves her from being forever trapped in a pegasus' body and most importantly– she gives her her family back and teaches her confidence and bravery. Moreover, due to the hero status of Barbie, which normally is assigned to male characters in traditional tales, it is easy to imagine the version of this story with Annika's role being played by a man, where he would probably become Brietta's love

[109] Emma Jane, "'No Bos Olib'– On the Gynocentrism and Sparkly Separatism of the Barbie Movies," *Fusion Journal,* No. 2, 2013.
[110] Adrienne Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," *Signs.* Vol 5, no. 4, 1980, 648-652.

interest, after saving her and her subjects. Therefore, the girls' relationship can be read as queer, since Annika already seems like her sister's knight in shining armour.

All the pictures attached in this chapter are from a Tumblr.com account called barbie-movie-confessions, which is a fan account posting pictures from various Barbie movies with captions on them and under in the description of each picture, as well as a source. Most likely, the original captions were sent to the author of the blog account, as they seemed to have quite an active community of followers there. This means it can be a great source of LGBTQ+ analysis, as people can post practically anonymously, while not going through a hustle of maintaining an active account to be able to attract followers to interact with. By giving a voice to the fan queer community, the owner of the account formed a database of queer readings of Barbie movies, probably unknowingly, since queer readings are only a fraction of posts. Because of that, the account opens up also heteronormative audiences to those queer readings, subsequently popularizing them even further and educating the heteronormative majority about queer tropes in media and queer experiences. This ties into McInroy's et al essay about fandom communities. The person who created this blog provided a safe space for queer individuals for sharing their opinions and analysis on the movies freely.[111]

[111] Lauren B. McInroy et.al, "Online Fandom Communities as Network Counterpublics: LGBTQ+ Youths' Perceptions of Representation and Community Climate," *Covergence: The International Journal or Research into New Media Technologies*, Vol. 28(3): 2022, 631.

3. Barbie: Fairytopia

The next movie this thesis will focus on is *Barbie: Fairytopia.* Contrary to the first 4 movies released by Mattel, this movie is an original story. The movie follows Elina, a wingless fairy, who lives in the Fairytopia land. She is ostracized and bullied by others for not having wings, which makes her different. Elina is considered disabled in the fairy community, which makes her daily life significantly more difficult, as the fairy world is designed for flying. She cannot fly around and play with others, so she stands out and is socially alienated. Luckily, she has Bibble, her sassy pet and a good friend, who will tell off any mean fairy and spend all day with her. She also has a best friend, Dandelion, who does not care about Elina's disability and often defends her. This could be read as a story about navigating an ableist world and overcoming one's own disability. This movie is rarely mentioned in the LGBTQ+ discourses, however, there are still a lot of queer motifs and possible queer readings in this story, which are continued and much more broadly discussed in it's sequel, *Barbie Fairytopia: Mermaidia,* which will be analyzed later.

The plot of the movie starts with a threat of Laverna, an evil fairy who is posing a danger to Fairytopia's safety. Soon enough, some mysterious smoke gets spread, which makes all the fairies unable to fly, including in the Magic Meadow, where Elina lives. With the guardian of her home missing, Elina realizes that someone has to notify the other guardians of the tragedy that struck her homeland and its inhabitants. Soon enough, it turns out that Elina is the only fairy strong enough to set on an adventure to save her home and all of Fairytopia, because she is the only one in the entire land, used to walking long distances, which makes her immune to the poisonous smoke. The audience follows her traveling to completely new lands, in order to defeat Laverna and restore peace in her home.

Considering that *Barbie:Fairytopia* is just an hour and a half children's movie, Elina is a very complex character. She is an outcast completely against her own will and is unable to change that, because she is simply disabled– born without the very body part that defines fairies' existence and differentiates them from other creatures. This, however, does not make her timid and closed off, quite the contrary– Elina is happy, genuine, brave and smart. Even though she cannot fly, she still manages to always find a way to travel and breaks all the physical barriers she encounters, like making a parachute out of a flower in order to be able

to fly off a cliff safely.[112] She also decides to set out on this dangerous journey to save the Fairytopia, even though she has never been accepted by its society. She is determined and brave, never giving up– no matter how hard things get.

An interesting feature in Elina's character, which is never really elaborated on in the movie, but is acknowledged by a few fairies, is a rainbow in her eye. It is first noticed by one of the guardians, Azura, when Elina visits her to notify her of the situation at the Magic Meadow.[113] Azura is at first cautious of Elina, as she knows other guardians have been previously kidnapped by Laverna and she might be next. However, she quickly warms up to her and trusts her, when she notices that Elina has a reflection of a rainbow in her eye when the sun illuminates her face. Azura explains to her that this means she is destined for great things, while Elina sees it as just another thing that makes her different.[114] This can be interpreted as a direct reference to Elina's queerness, as the colors of the LGBTQ+ flag form a rainbow and they have been a well-known symbol of the community for decades.

Figure 10: u/Puggerbug-2709 at r/actuallylesbians, "Barbie really did play a big role in my gay ass sapphic identity: Exhibit A Barbie Fairytopia," Reddit,

Elina's rainbow eye. The text above suggests that characters such as Elina helped some queer viewers to form their identity.

[112] Will Lau and Walter Martishius, *Barbie: Fairytopia*, (Mainframe Entertainment and Mattel Entertainment, 2005). Timestamp: 21:00-21:45.
[113] Will Lau and Walter Martishius, *Barbie: Fairytopia*, (Mainframe Entertainment and Mattel Entertainment, 2005). Timestamp: 24:25-24:30.
[114] Will Lau and Walter Martishius, *Barbie: Fairytopia*, (Mainframe Entertainment and Mattel Entertainment, 2005). Timestamp: 25:47-25:59.

This, combined with the fact that Elina considers herself to be different and not fit the fairy society, she certainly matches the misfit trope. This motif was present in Plato's character from *Rebel Without a Cause*, which has been discussed in *Celluloid Closet*, a queer cinema documentary movie.[115] Similar to Elina, Plato does not fit into the society and is bullied at school, because he is different. Even though his otherness is more hidden, everyone is able to pick up on it and knows that there is something "wrong" with him. Elina's difference is much more obvious, but she still manages to survive in the movie with no major problems and is able to actively participate in the fairy society. However, she is still ostracized, as most fairies cannot look past her otherness. Elina's existence questions what it means to be a fairy. Because of that, she poses a similar threat to the fairy identity, as queer people do to the heteronormativity and the gender binary. As Annamarie Jagose explained, queerness rebels against heteronormativity and questions it, threatening the established patriarchal social order.[116]

Elina's existence threatens the order of the fairy society in a very similar way. She threatens the homogeneity of the fairy race. One individual that is fundamentally different than the rest can start a "gender and sexual" revolution (or here a "wingless" revolution) and disrupt all of the social norms. Perhaps the fairies are worried that if Elina with no wings can call herself a fairy, soon mermaids will call themselves fairies with tails and no wings and Laverna's minions, the fungi, will be able to claim the label for themselves too. If a fairy with no wings can still call herself a fairy, what stops everyone else from doing so? This would mean that the creatures doing this would reject the category they were born into and embrace the other as their identity. They would challenge those strict frames of their society, where the definition of a fairy is very clear and does not allow for any deviation. Much like queer people do with gender, the creatures by assuming a different creature's identity, would threaten their version of a "heteronormative society."

To explain what is stopping others from becoming next queer Elina, it is ostracization and bullying. If others see that the fairy society does not welcome and embrace the otherness and variations of identity, they will not want to be in Elina's position themselves. Similarly, a queer individual can be punished and alienated from a heteronormative society, because of their lack of conformity. Their unusual (in the eyes of the majority) gender expression, for example in the case of trans individuals, causes the discourse exactly like that to form, where those people are seen as a threat, just like Elina. According to Rubin, the people who do not

[115] Rob Epstein and Jeffrey Friedman et al, *The Celluloid Closet,* USA, 1995. Timestamp: (48:28-1:00:00).
[116] Annamarie Jagose *Queer Theory: An Introduction*, (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 1-2.

conform to the heteronormative hierarchy pyramid, like queer people, fall below the bottom line and are ostracized,[117] as they threaten the order of society. Another example is, the Hays Production Code, discussed in the *Celluloid Closet*, was presenting the "indecent behavior" in a negative light or outwardly prohibited it, in order to not promote and even show such actions were accepted. This lead to LGBTQ+ individuals fearing coming out and stay closeted, fighting their desire and real sexual identity, as popular culture taught them that this would inevitably have a tragic end.[118] While Elina embraces her otherness, it is also important to remember that she cannot exactly hide it, like one (however difficult it would be) could with homosexuality, which is invisible. Therefore, her only option is to try and live her life not letting her difference affect her.

The second time the rainbow in her eye is noticed, is by Laverna, the evil fairy, who is very surprised when she sees it and after taking a closer look at her, she states that they are very similar. She explains that they are both the odd ones in their society, rejected, made fun of and unappreciated for who they are.[119] Laverna is queer, which made her become evil. It is not specified what happened in her past and what exactly makes her queer, however, she does have some features of a queer villain, according to Kim's essay. She is an outcast, has underlings, fungi, who do her work for her and has a dramatic, over exaggerated and campy body language, such as big theatrical gestures. She does relate to Elina's alienation and uses it, in order to create a connection between them. Moreover, Laverna claims she can change Elina and make her fit into the fairy society. With her magic powers she tries to convince Elina to turn against the fairy species, by promising her wings. In return, she would gain power over Fairytopia and make everyone that did not appreciate her pay for their actions. This could be the metaphor for promises of change of one's repressed sexuality, for example through conversion therapy, where in return people who promote it, can get endorsed by religious and other far right organizations. Laverna can be read here as a queer person who cannot accept her otherness like Elina does and therefore she tries to push her internalized homo- or queer-phobia onto her. From her monologue it seems like she has not been accepted by the society and all she now wants is to fit in and show everyone that she can be as respectable and perfect as her sister, the Enchantress.

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[117] Gayle S. Rubin, "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sex," from *Culture, Society and Sexualiy*, London: Routlegde (2006), 151-152.
[118] Rob Epstein and Jeffrey Friedman et al, *The Celluloid Closet,* USA, 1995. Timestamp: (48:28-1:00:00).
[119] Will Lau and Walter Martishius, *Barbie: Fairytopia*, (Mainframe Entertainment and Mattel Entertainment, 2005). Timestamp: 57:04-57:40.

Laverna represents the weak queer villain, who cannot accept herself and make people in her life to like her with her pure heart, so she resolves to force. It is clear in the movie that Laverna is trying to sell Elina a lie, an impossible fantasy and complying with it, would be wrong and inherently against Elina's nature. Barbie's character is at first hypnotized and tempted by the idea, because she craves being normal, even though in her daily life she manages to not get her otherness be an obstacle for her. Luckily, she manages to shake the spell off, embracing her difference. She realizes she does of need to be the same as others, accepting her individuality and the power of friendship.[120] Laverna's story, however, is a reminder to Elina that she could one day become her, if she forgets her morals. That is why she feels even more obligated to fight with her in the sequel of the movie. It is important to note here that Elina is depicted here as the "good queerness", while Laverna represents the "bad queerness." Elina conforms to the patriarchal society by being girly and pure (qualities endorsed by postfeminism), while Laverna on the other hand turned evil, chose exile from the fairy society, does not appeal to men by choosing to dress feminine and is driven by anger, a masculine emotion (not endorsed by postfeminism). Because of that, Laverna places under the hierarchy pyramid of sexuality, even though she only wishes for acceptance, while Elina simply places on the bottom of it, still higher than her.

The rainbow in Elina's eye is certainly supposed to mean she is special, however, it also adds to her differences from other fairies. Even though she does not let it get to her on the daily basis, she is aware of the fact that she is not a complete fairy and stands out from the rest. In the movie, this turns out to be something that allows her to be the hero and actually becomes an advantage for her. Thanks to always having to adjust to the inaccessible world around her, Elina is creative and not afraid of new challenges and thinking outside of the box. Her otherness made her grow quite a thick skin, so she does not give up, no matter how much others will try to tell her that her ideas are impossible.

As mentioned before, Elina's story can be read as a disability tale, but it also has some queer tropes. For example, feeling like one does not fit into their society. Elina does not know any other wingless fairies, so she feels alienated and like something is wrong with her. She tries not to show that she is bothered by her difference, but her conversations with Azura and Laverna show that she does in fact deep down still wish that she was like everyone else. Moreover, Elina's otherness is best explained with Wilchins' argument about language

[120] Will Lau and Walter Martishius, *Barbie: Fairytopia*, (Mainframe Entertainment and Mattel Entertainment, 2005). Timestamp: 1:00:18-1:00:28.

and queerness. Humans learn of things by excluding everything else from the term.[121] In the movie there is not even a word for a wingless fairy. Wings are the most recognizable and common forms of identifying fairies in fantasy stories and sometimes folklore. According to the Cambridge Dictionary a fairy is "an imaginary creature with magic powers, usually represented as a very small person with wings."[122] When fairies do not have them, they become something else, an unspecified category with no name, queer and odd. Furthermore, as Sedgwick explained, queerness is a form of embracing one's otherness,[123] which Elina does.

At the end of the movie Elina gets her wings from the Enchantress, however, she is still different from other fairies. Her wings are given to her in a form of a magic necklace, which when worn, gives the person real wings. It is a form of a disability aid. The Enchantress acknowledges that Elina does not need them, embracing her difference, but that she deserves a gift for being brave and fighting for Fairytopia, even though she has been ostracized all her life by its inhabitants.[124] (07:14-06:32 netflix) To solidify her feminine image, the wings she is given are pink and sparkly. This strongly ties in with the girl power ideas talked about by Zaslow, who explains that in this movement independence is conditional. A girl can be brave and have autonomy over herself, however, she has to stay feminine.[125] Throughout the movie, Elina still looks very girly. In fact, she is the only fairy dressed all in pink. Considering pink is culturally strongly related to femininity, Barbie's character color palette can be seen as a compensation for her unfeminine image throughout the movie (being the brave hero, saving others and even emasculating male characters like Hue, the butterfly guardian assigned to her by Azura).

The scene when Hue breathes in the poisonous smoke and loses energy and Elina firmly tells him to take a break and tries to take care of him, can be read as emasculating. In the end, she also saves him from Laverna, who captured him. This has been discusses by Emma Jane in her article on sparkly separatism of Barbie. She explains that the movie franchise does not overthrow gender roles, but rather it simply reverses them, still keeping

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[121] Riki Wilchins, *Queer Theory, Gender Theory: An Instant Primer,* (Los Angeles: Alyson Books, 2004), 36.
[122] *Cambridge Dictionary*, "fairy," <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/fairy>. Last accessed June 25, 2023.
[123] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Queer and Now," in *The Routledge Queer Studies Reader*, edited by Donald E. Hall, et al, (New York: Routledge, 2013), 8.
[124] Will Lau and Walter Martishius, *Barbie: Fairytopia*, (Mainframe Entertainment and Mattel Entertainment, 2005). Timestamp: 1:03:53-1:04:04.
[125] Emilie Zaslow, *Feminism, Inc.: Coming of Age in Girl Power Media Culture,* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 10.

the gender binary order[126]– making the character appear queer due to the gender role reversal. Elina is playing a role of a protector here, while Hue is trying to fulfill his masculine role and be independent, but cannot do so. Instead, she gives him orders and he is forced to follow them, due to his worsening physical condition.[127] Moreover, Elina's sparkly wings can be a way to feminize her image at the end of the story, as no other fairy has glitter in her wings. Another part of Elina's over-femininity is her body language. She walks with her hands spread out around her skirt, like a ballerina, which is a quite campy posture and stands out even among other fairies. This can be read as a a way to further feminize her and make her align more with the postfeminist image of a woman/girl– strong and independent, but still sexy, cute and girly.[128]

[126] Emma Jane, "'No Bos Olib'– On the Gynocentrism and Sparkly Separatism of the Barbie Movies," *Fusion Journal,* No. 2, 2013.
[127] Will Lau and Walter Martishius, *Barbie: Fairytopia*, (Mainframe Entertainment and Mattel Entertainment, 2005). Timestamp: 41:16-41:50.
[128] Emilie Zaslow, *Feminism, Inc.: Coming of Age in Girl Power Media Culture,* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 1-5.

4. Barbie Fairytopia: Mermaidia

The movie is a sequel to Fairytopia and continues to follow Elina on her adventures. The movie begins back in the Magic Meadow, where Elina is finally accepted and takes full advantage of her wings. She is delivered a message by a little fairy that prince Nalu, her mermaid friend from the previous movie, has been kidnapped and needs her help. This immediately shows the viewers that Elina is known to be a great hero and everyone, even mermaids, have heard of her great bravery and her adventure from the previous movie. The butterfly messenger is completely starstruck by Elina, getting confused and mindlessly talking about the serious issue, instead of delivering the message properly, which she catches herself doing.

Once at the mermaids' cove, Elina meets Nori, a mermaid girl, who is in love with Nalu. Nori wrongfully assumes that the prince is romantically interested in Elina and that the feeling is mutual, so she sees her as a rival, not wanting to work with her to find her crush. She decides she will save Nalu on her own and tries to get rid of Elina, whom she's jealous of. Nori is rather self centered and full of herself from the very beginning of the movie. She thinks Elina is in direct competition to her and sees her as a threat to her relationship with the prince. She says "I don't need some fairy to get in my way."[129] Which gives the viewer a clear signal she does not think highly of fairies, especially Elina, as she is famous and Nori just calls her "some fairy," as if she was not important at all, trying to belittle her. Nori wants to save the prince on her own, because this might make him give his attention to her and love her.

Quickly it turns out that Nori actually needs Elina's help and so the girls form a team. From then on they start building a friendship, even though the mermaid still sees Elina as her competition and she actively tries to show her she is better than her. She is voicing her worry about Elina's and Nalu's relationship, since she wants to marry him. An interesting thing is that Elina simply does not seem to understand why Nori does not like her and does not want her to get involved in finding the prince. She is unaware of the fact that Nori thinks Nalu might have a crush on her. Nori suspects not only that the prince is in love with the fairy, but also that the feeling is mutual. In reality it does not seem like something Nori should be concerned with, since Elina sees him only as a friend and has no desire towards

[129] Will Lau and Walter Martishius, *Barbie: Mermaidia*, (Mainframe Entertainment and Mattel Entertainment, 2006). Timestamp: 14:43-14:45.

him. This, in the eyes of heterosexual conservative viewers makes the fairy seem more childlike and “asexually innocent.” However, for queer audiences, it makes it seem more like she might actually be more interested in Nori herself, considering their growing relationship, which is the focal point of the movie.

Arguably the scene with the most homoerotic subtext scene of this movie is the one where the girls get on a snail ferry lady and ask her to open her shell for them. She asks "Open my shell?!" And says: "well of course," with a sly smile and in a suddenly rather flirtatious tone of voice.[130] The snail also has quite "sexy" facial features, with elongated slightly slanted eyes, long lashes and big pink lips. She is very feminine and is supposed to look like a mature woman snail. She certainly is older than the girls and acts as an authority figure. It is then revealed that she is in fact the all knowing Delphine, who the girls were looking for. They ask her for directions to Nalu, but instead she gives them a challenge. They have to travel to the Depths of Despair to find the Mirror of the Mist and work together to succeed in their journey to find answers to their question. This will demand from them the need to rely on each other, or else both will fail. The shell here could be read as a metaphor for a vulva. From the moment she opens it for them, the girls start growing closer, which I think might be read as them opening up to a symbol of lesbian desire, femininity and girlhood/womanhood and therefore grow to desire each other. Moreover, considering she knows everything going on in Mermaidia, it can be assumed that she pairs the girls up together on purpose challenging them to get to know each other, acting as a matchmaker for them. She even admits she knows where Nalu is, but she informs them she will not tell them. Instead she sends them on this difficult and dangerous adventure knowing it will make them create an unbreakable bond, otherwise she would not do that. I think that this could be tied to Rich’s idea of lesbian continuum, where lesbian love between women provides them with liberation from the patriarchal society.[131] Here, knowing that the girls will grow stronger together once they set on their journey facing challenges, so that they actually grow into

[130] Will Lau and Walter Martishius, *Barbie: Mermaidia*, (Mainframe Entertainment and Mattel Entertainment, 2006). Timestamp: 30:27-30:37.
[131] Adrienne Rich, “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence,” *Signs.* Vol 5, no. 4, 1980, 648-652.

loving each other and have enough power and trust in their relationship that they will be able to save Nalu from the queer fungi.

Figure 12: "Delphine," Personality Database,

Delphine's "sexy" face with long lashes, seductive look and large lips.

Figure 11: Luz Tito Ortiz, "Fairytopia Mermaidia," Pinterest,

Delphine's shell.

Once they start diving deep into the ocean, Elina finds herself unable to swim fast enough to fight the current. Nori leaves her behind, despite Delphine's warnings and gets trapped. To save her, Elina has to trade her wings for a tail, which is one of the greatest sacrifices for a fairy, but especially for her, because she just got her wings. However, she does not waste much time and completes the trade to save Nori, even though she knows she might end up with a tail forever and never be able to return to the Magic Meadow. I think this shows how much she is willing to sacrifice for a mermaid, who is practically a stranger to her and who does not even appreciate her company. Elina is the true hero here, she is brave and understands that another life is more valuable than her looks and own body. Moreover, this makes the girls be more similar and therefore fit together better. The change is necessary for Elina to both survive and be able to grow closer with Nori. It can also be understood as breaking of the last barrier between the girls and them becoming a perfect, invincible pair. Silva and Lynch call it a "rivals to lovers" narrative in their article, as Elina first feels like she has to prove herself to Nori, who often challenges her, to then finally accept their similarities and grow to like her.[132] Their initial hostility towards each other adds makes their later relationship seem even stronger on top of that.

[132] Katherine Lynch and Carly Silva, "Barbie Movies Ranked According to How Gay They Made Me," *Her Campus*, March 9th, 2021. Available at: <https://www.hercampus.com/school/emmanuel/barbie-movies-ranked-according-how-gay-they-made-me/>, accessed June 7th, 2023.

Figure 13: "Barbie Fairytopia: Mermaidia," IMDb,

Elina and Nori racing down the waterfall. Nori is visibly determined to win, which shows that the girls were rivals in the beginning and especially Nori saw Elina as competition, in turn, the fairy felt the need to prove herself to her.

Once the girls find the Mirror of the Mist, they are questioned by its guardian whether they really want to know where Nalu is, as the mirror knows all answers and can reveal any secret to them. However, they have made up their mind and prove to not be gluttonous, asking only about what they came there for. Once they set out on their journey to find Nalu, now that they finally know where he is, they notice that identical, mysterious markings appear on their arms. Nori comes to the conclusion that they must be the mythical crest of courage which according to the legend is the prize for being brave enough to travel to the bottom of Mermaidia.[133] I think that these marks can be seen as lesbian badges for them, the girls are now recognized by their joined experiences, where they tested their identities, built a strong bond and learned to love each other. They can be read as the symbol of the girls' mutual growing love and devotion, especially considering the adventure they are going to have to face next.

Figure 14: Grazyeeeee, "Barbie Mermaidia," Pinterest,

Elina and Nori with their crests of courage, which also solidify their growing bond.

[133] Will Lau and Walter Martishius, *Barbie: Mermaidia*, (Mainframe Entertainment and Mattel Entertainment, 2006). Timestamp: 47:22-47:43.

Along their journey the girls find themselves at a crossroad where the magic bubble beacon that was guiding them pops. With no more help, they must choose the right path and Nori insists on going through the dangerous tunnel filled with deadly gazers. Elina and her companion Bibble are terrified and doubt the idea, but Nori looks at her and asks: "Do you trust me?"[134] and Elina admits she does, but she just doubts herself. Then, Nori grabs her hand and promises that they will do it together. The strength of the girls bond can be fully observed here. Compared to the beginning of their journey, when Nori did not want to have anything to do with Elina, now the girls have grown to be so strong together that they can trust one another with their lives. They grew gradually to become more and more similar and love each other. Nori does keep her promise and the two girls make it safely to the other side. Bibble gets left somewhere behind, but Nori goes back for him and guides him safely too, risking her life for her friend's beloved pet.

Figure 15: "Barbie Fairytopia: Mermaidia," IMDb,

Elina and Nori holding hands before they swim through the gazer cave. This is the moment when the girls solidify their trust for each other.

It can be observed that Elina– Barbie, is not the only postfeminist hero in this story, like she was in previous movies. Nori is also brave, rebellious, smart, feminine and conventionally pretty. She is not very girly and pure in her behavior, though, unlike Elina– who is graceful, sweet and kind. Nori is rude, short tempered and very sassy. She comes off as rather vain and self-centered, but that is because in reality she is deeply insecure. Elina helps her find that security with her tenderness and love. She is the feminine icon that feminizes Nori too, making her calmer and more polite. Elina's love changes the hot headed Nori for the better. This shows to the viewer that being pure and feminine is the only good way to be, it is the only progression one can make when improving themselves if they are a

[134] Will Lau and Walter Martishius, *Barbie: Mermaidia*, (Mainframe Entertainment and Mattel Entertainment, 2006). Timestamp: 49:16-49:51.

woman. This is a message of postfeminism that Zaslow talks about in her book *Feminism Inc.*– proper women's independence, one that is approved by society, is one that is feminine.[135]

In the garden of magic berries, the girls start talking and Elina suggests that Nori could give a magic potion berry to Nalu, since she is in love with him. Nori denies, embarrassed, and says that it does not matter, because princes do not marry commoners like her and that she believes Nalu is in love with someone else, clearly assuming he loves Elina. The fairy is, however, still clueless that Nalu could find her attractive. This shows clearly Nori's insecurity, confirming that she does not see herself as worthy of Nalu. She does not think she is good enough for him, but she does not have those feelings with Elina when she gets to know her better. The fairy's status is more comfortable and welcoming, not to mention that Elina is an outcast in her own society and did not fit in there for a long time. Perhaps that is why Nori (who also is trying to fit into a higher class society, where she does not belong) feels like she can first project her internalized insecurity onto her and treat her badly, to later finally accept they are similar and respect her, which eventually strengthens their relationship. It is when Nori realizes that they are both similar, their otherness and queerness connects them and they grow closer.

This movie explores Laverna's minions– the fungi creatures. They are queer coded according to the same patterns Kim explores in her essay, like body language or appearance,[136] even though they are not exactly the main villains. All of them are male. They are ugly, skinny and rather feminine. They are fearful and simply stupid, with their leader, Max, using a sophisticated language that is an attempt at making himself seem smarter and more capable than others of his kind. However, in reality he is just a fungi and nothing can change that. He also wears a fancy purple outfit, which is far too extravagant for a mere villains minion, which also makes him stand out more. His fancy dressing is not for Laverna. She still sees him as just a "stupid fungi," but among his peers he does manage to establish authority with that, which shows even further that fungi in general are not very bright, since they fall for it. They, much like Laverna in the previous movie, represent the "bad queerness." They are not conforming to the patriarchal society, so their portrayal is negative, as the movie follows the postfeminist ideals of gender roles. The negative portrayals of queerness have their roots in the character of the sissy, which was used for comedic value,

[135] Emilie Zaslow, *Feminism, Inc.: Coming of Age in Girl Power Media Culture,* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 10-11.
[136] Koeun Kim, "Queer-Coded Villains (And Why You Should Care)," *Dialogues@RU*, 2017, 159-160.

all the way to characters of monsters and vampires, like the Frankenstein monster and lesbian vampires in the movies of the Hays Production Code era.[137] By approving of some versions of queerness like Elina's, which is for lack of a better word– more settle and possible to classify as simply a need for the postfeminist independence every heterosexual girl of the 90s and early 2000s craves, while disapproving of others, the movie gives the viewers a clear message: "you can have a different identity, but do not make it obvious, do not stand out."

When Elina and Nori find Nalu, they see that he is guarded by two fungi, while Max is looking for a magic berry for Laverna. The whole time while they talk through something resembling a cellphone, Laverna screams at and belittles him. She is emasculating him, while he is apologetic to her, which is a huge contrast to how bossy authoritative he is with the other two fungi working for him. He also, much like Nori does to Elina, projects his insecurity onto them. The fact that Max is emasculated by Laverna ties into what Jane pointed out in her essay on gender role reversal in Barbie movies: they keep the patriarchal order unthreatened, because they simply reverse the roles, but keep the order of gender roles– evil is feminine and good is masculine.[138]

Elina and Nori send Bibble, who has eaten multiple magic berries, to sing an opera song to distract the two fungi. When he does that, they begin dancing and get very emotional because of the beautiful female voice coming out of Bibble. They start hugging and telling each other how much they love one another, which is unusual for a kids' movie, as they are both male. This shows their feminine weakness to the audience, which makes them incapable of completing even the simplest tasks. This once more relates to the idea of the "gender role reversal" Jane talks about in "No Bos Olib," by getting emotional over an opera performance, the fungi show they are not tough men, who do not ever show any feelings. As a result of their "softness," they are so enchanted by Bibble's opera voice that they follow it and leave Nalu unattended.[139] When Max comes back and Nalu is nowhere to be found, he sends his subordinates to look for him and get the magic berry the girls stole too. Max, in a traditionally queer villain fashion, does not do much work himself, he sends his subordinates to do things for him,[140] much like Laverna sends him to do things for her. Because he is subordinate to her, however, he is not a proper villain, as he just abuses his power, but does not gain

[137] Rob Epstein and Jeffrey Friedman et al, *The Celluloid Closet,* USA, 1995. Timestamp: (13:54-19:36).
[138] Emma Jane, "'No Bos Olib'– On the Gynocentrism and Sparkly Separatism of the Barbie Movies," *Fusion Journal,* No. 2, 2013.
[139] Will Lau and Walter Martishius, *Barbie: Mermaidia*, (Mainframe Entertainment and Mattel Entertainment, 2006). Timestamp: 55:02-55:55.
[140] Koeun Kim, "Queer-Coded Villains (And Why You Should Care)," *Dialogues@RU*, 2017, 159-160.

anything from it but satisfaction. The fungi are a great example of how Barbie movies emasculate and feminize men, showing them in a negative light.[141] Not only are the male fungi emasculated by Laverna, but also Elina and Nori here– as they are smarter than them and they show that the fungi are not a real threat to them.

While the fungi run after Bibble, the girls save Nalu and feel the pressure of time, as Elina's magic necklace has almost completely turned white and when that happens and she is still in the water, she will remain a mermaid forever. She almost makes it out, but unfortunately has to jump back in, in order to save Mermaidia from a poison Max throws in the water– sacrificing her wings forever. Lynch and Silva point out in their article that this scene has a slight trans subtext to it. They explain that Elina having to give up her wings for a tail causes an identity crisis for her.[142] She fears she will stay a mermaid forever, unable to transition back. That is when Nori comes up with an idea to have Elina eat the berry which shows one's true self, as she believes she is still a fairy and has not changed at all inside. Elina is worried that her true self does not have wings, but Nori says it is not that much of a problem, as she would be back to her real self and something that she knows. She says: "You'd be you! Smart and brave, and everything that makes you special!"[143] This shows that deep down Elina's true identity is still valid and so she can in fact be herself again. She can transition so her body matches her identity– hence the trans narrative.

Elina eats the fruit and turns into an even more majestic fairy, as her wings are much bigger now. Nalu notes that everything turned out right and grabs Nori's hand. She is confused and says that she thought he was in love with Elina, to which the shocked fairy says "With me?! No! Nalu and I are just friends. Nalu's in love with you, just like you're in love with him."[144] Once again Barbie not have a romantic partner. While the first movie suggested that Nalu might have gotten a crush on Elina and the feeling was mutual from the long lustful looks they gave each other, as well as Bibble's silly comments, this movie proves that it was not the case. It might have been an executive decision to give Nalu a much more masculine girlfriend like Nori, after the first movie came out. In *Fairytopia* it seemed like he was going to become a love interest for Elina, but in the sequel this plot was completely

[141] Emma Jane, "'No Bos Olib'– On the Gynocentrism and Sparkly Separatism of the Barbie Movies," *Fusion Journal,* No. 2, 2013.
[142] Katherine Lynch and Carly Silva, "Barbie Movies Ranked According to How Gay They Made Me," *Her Campus*, March 9th, 2021. Available at: <https://www.hercampus.com/school/emmanuel/barbie-movies-ranked-according-how-gay-they-made-me/>, accessed June 7th, 2023.
[143] Will Lau and Walter Martishius, *Barbie: Mermaidia*, (Mainframe Entertainment and Mattel Entertainment, 2006). Timestamp: 1:03:22-1:04:09.
[144] Will Lau and Walter Martishius, *Barbie: Mermaidia*, (Mainframe Entertainment and Mattel Entertainment, 2006). Timestamp: 1:05:37-1:05:54.

scrapped. Perhaps she was too gentle of a character for Nalu's partner, which would cause both their characters to be too feminine and calm. Nori on the other hand is more boyish and outgoing, which counters him better. Another reason why the plot was not continued might be because Elina was considered to be a good role model as an asexual heroine, which made her more independent. She is also one of the only Barbie characters that stars in a movie that is not focused on female friendship. *Fairytopia* explores themes of being a misfit in a very homogenous society and learning to accept one's difference as well as love one's community and believe in the power of good acts– that they will be appreciated. This does not fully align with the postfeminist message Mattel was trying to promote for their audiences at the time, though, as their main focus was promoting feminine community and the importance of girlhood as a support system. It makes sense then that they would decide to give Elina this girl power-girl friendship plot in a typical Barbie "galpal" fashion. Thanks to that, the audiences have a chance to see Elina build a very strong new bond with a strong character like Nori.

It is also important to focus here on Dandelion, Elina's best friend from the Magic Meadow. After the two brief appearances in both movies, it is easier to do an analysis of her now. Dandelion is a bubbly yellow fairy that has been Elina's neighbor for a very long time. She lives with her mom and supports Elina in her adventures. She has always accepted her wingless friend and defended her from others. Dandelion does not appear much in movies and is not even mentioned most of the time, but she is always there in the background, waiting for Elina to come home. At the end of this movie, Elina meets with Dandelion back at the Magic Meadow and the girls fly together towards the rainbow, while Bibble tells her about their amazing adventure. It might be that Elina is not involved with Nalu and does not end up as a mermaid with Nori, because she already has a lover waiting for her. This is what some people have pointed out in Barbie Movie Confessions on Tumblr. Some fans have pointed out that they have always liked the "ship" of Elina and Dandelion more over Elina and Nori. Perhaps Dandelion has always been the real soulmate of Elina and Nori was just a

fling? They do fly towards the rainbow together, which has been a symbol of the LGBTQ+ community for decades, as if their life now was getting back to normal.

Figure 17: Barbie-movie-confesions, Tumblr,

Elina and Dandelion flying towards the rainbow, which possibly symbolizes they were meant to be together all along.

Figure 16: "Barbie Fairytopia: Magic of the Rainbow," Kinorium,

Elina and Dandelion at the Magic Meadow. The text on the picture rejects the popular shipping of Nori and Elina, instead favoring Dandelion as the lesbian partner of the fairy.

Elina's queerness once again is defined by her otherness and lack of a male romantic interest. Her story focuses on close and strong female friendship this time around, presenting the themes of girl power and girlhood. She has been further feminized in *Mermaidia* by being contrasted with Nori. She is gentler and more innocently girly, however, still manages to remain a hero. She is dealing with a lot of self-doubt which Nori saves her from in the end, allowing her to believe in her true self and embrace her identity, no matter the outcome. As Sedgwick explains in her essay, queerness is about breaking the binary and heteronormative norms,[145] which Elina does in the terms of a traditional fairy tale. She comes to save the prince, along with another girl and they go through tests of courage and bonding. She never gets a lover, she does not fit into the heteronormative rules imposed on her by the patriarchal culture where a woman is always the one saved by the prince in a shining armor. Here Elina is the hero, she saves the feminized prince who got ambushed and threatened with such ease by three fungi who serve a woman.

[145] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Queer and Now," in *The Routledge Queer Studies Reader*, edited by Donald E. Hall, et al, (New York: Routledge, 2013), 8.

5. Barbie and the Diamond Castle

This movie is a fable told by Barbie and her best friend Theresa to Barbie's little sister Stacy, who got into a fight with her best friend, Courtney. Stacy barges into the room where the two are singing together. She is so angry and frustrated that she even suggests she does not need friends, when Barbie and Theresa tell her to try and make up with Courtney. To explain how important friendship is, the two older girls tell Stacy a moral story about friendship.[146]

This is a girl power narrative, as the whole movie from the very beginning focus' on girlhood and importance of friendship, or as some people have pointed out "how lesbian love can save the world."[147] Their story is about two best friends: Liana, portrayed by Barbie, and Alexa, played by Theresa. The two lead a simple life, living together in a small cottage and growing flowers, which they sell at a local market. They are poor as their crops have not been growing well this year. But the two have great dreams and do not give up, making their life a little brighter by singing together daily.

Figure 18: Barbiemoviestrivia, "My 2018 Tumblr Top 10," Tumblr,

Barbie and Theresa singing a song to Stacy, ready to tell her a story of the Diamond Castle. The text on the bottom suggests that Barbie and Theresa are dating and they are preparing to tell Stacy a story about the power of lesbian love.

The first song from this movie, titled "Two Voices, One Song,"[148] is a piece worth a separate analysis.

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[146] Gino Nichele, *Barbie and the Diamond Castle*, (Mattel Entertainment, Rainmaker Entertainment, 2008). Timestamp: 01:41-02:36.
[147] Tumblr pic origin/reddit
[148] Gino Nichele, *Barbie and the Diamond Castle*, (Mattel Entertainment, Rainmaker Entertainment, 2008). Timestamp: 2:43-03:54.

It's so rare to find a friend like you
Somehow when you're around the sky is always blue
The way we talk
The things you say
The way you make it all ok
And how you know
All of my jokes
But you laugh anyway...

If I could wish for one thing
I take the smile that you bring
Wherever you go in this world I'll come along

Together we dream the same dream
Forever I'm here for you, you're here for me
Oh ooh oh
Two voices, one song

And anywhere you are you know I'll be around
And when you call my name I'll listen for the sound

If I could wish for one thing
I take the smile that you bring
Wherever you go in this world I'll come along
Together we dream the same dream
Forever I'm here for you, you're here for me
Oh ooh oh two voices one song

If I could wish for one thing
I take the smile that you bring
With you by my side I can go on

Now I have all that I need
And the sweetest sound will always be
Oh ooh oh two voices one song
Oh ooh oh two voices one song
Oh ooh oh two voices one song[149]

I read it as a song about great devotion between the two girls. They talk about always being there for each other (literally and figuratively) and never leaving each other's side, vowing to live in a lifelong companionship. In the first part of the song the girls explain why their life is better, because they have each other in it. The world always looks better, seeming brighter and more positive and they have no worries. The girls also understand and know each other very well, but never lose interest with the other. They promise that as long as they are together, they will be able to withstand any hardships life throws their way, as they are able to sustain each other with their love. This, however, as pointed out by many members of the LGBTQ+ community, who have discussed the movie online, is more similar to a love song rather than a best friend's song. This is confirmed in Alexander Avila's analysis, as

[149] Barbie, "Two Voices, One Song," *Genius Lyrics*, <https://genius.com/Barbie-two-voices-one-song-lyrics>. Accessed June 26th, 2023.

well as Aunna Bernanek in her essay "*Barbie and the Diamond Castle* is a Film that Radiates Queerness," where she points out the song's subtext is obviously romantic.[150] This is even more exaggerated by the fact that the song ends with a shot from the inside of their little hut, where they have two beds in one room. Their living situation and lyrics of their song hint more towards inseparable lesbian lovers, than close roommates. Beranek poses a question of whether the girls are just roommates or lovers in her essay. She points out that their conversations about their future, as well as simple chores have a romantic and flirtatious subtext, coming to the conclusion that they are more than roommates.[151]

Figure 19: Amber Warren, "Barbie Life," Pinterest,

Liana and Alexa sitting on their beds in their tiny cottage, singing a song together. The layout of the cottage suggests that the girls have very little to not privacy, therefore, their relationship is very intimate and their current living situation does not allow for romance.

The girls' peaceful life is disrupted when a huge storm comes after they find two heart shaped stones which they make into matching necklaces.[152] The stones are later revealed to come from the Diamond Castle and to me they look like they symbolize the girls' mutual love and shared interest in music, which brings them closer and is the main way of expressing their feelings. The girls pick up the two magic stones and promise to always be best friends while holding hands. They make the stones into necklaces, which turns them into physical tokens of their love. Dawn, in their article "This is the Gayest (and Greatest) Barbie Movie of All Time," which is their queer analysis of the movie discussed in this

[150] Aunna Beranek, "'Barbie and the Diamond Castle' Is a Film That Radiates Queerness," *Study Breaks Magazine*, Jul 7th, 2022. Available at: <https://studybreaks.com/tvfilm/barbie-and-the-diamond-castle-is-a-film-that-radiates-queerness/>, accessed Jun 7th, 2023.
[151] Ibid.
[152] Gino Nichele, *Barbie and the Diamond Castle*, (Mattel Entertainment, Rainmaker Entertainment, 2008). Timestamp: 04:52-05:25.

chapter, explains that in their opinion this is a romantic moment and the queer audience might at this point start to heavily "ship" the two girls, if they have not done so before.[153]

Figure 20: Dawn, "This is the Gayest (and Greatest) Barbie Movie of All Time," Medium Magazine,

The heart shaped stone made into a necklace. The text below suggests that the girls' life seems like a beautifully romantic lesbian fantasy.

The storm completely destroys their garden and only livelihood source. When they start cleaning up, they sing another song about friendship and working for their dreams.[154]

I'm blind-folded on this carriage ride that they call life.
Keep trying to make it through the next turn, knuckles white and holdin' tight.
So here I go, takin' the curve,
But I know that I'm never alone.
I think of you, and how you never let me go.

I feel connected (connected), protected (protected),
It's like you're standing right with me all the time.
You hear me (you hear me), you're near me (you're near me),
And everything else is gonna be alright.
'Cause nothing can break this, nothing can break this, nothing can break this tie.

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[153] Dawn, "This is the Gayest (and Greatest) Barbie Movie of All Time," *Medium Magazine*, Jul 7th, 2021. Available at: <https://dxwn.medium.com/this-is-the-gayest-and-greatest-barbie-movie-of-all-time-431996d17d2a>, accessed Jun 7th, 2023.
[154] Gino Nichele, *Barbie and the Diamond Castle*, (Mattel Entertainment, Rainmaker Entertainment, 2008). Timestamp: 10:12-11:42.

Connected, oh connected inside.

It's not an accident, the time we spent apart.
But now we're so close, I can always find you right here in my heart.
You've given me somethin' I need, and I don't ever want it to end.
Because of you, I know I've found my strength again.

I feel connected (connected), protected (protected),
It's like you're standing right with me all the time.
You hear me (you hear me), you're near me (you're near me),
And everything else is gonna be alright.
'Cause nothing can break this, nothing can break this, nothing can break this tie.
Connected, oh connected inside.

Every time that I breathe, I can feel the energy.
Reachin' out, flowin' through, you to me and me to you. Wake or dream,
Walk or stand, you are everywhere I am.
Separate souls, unified, touching at the speed of light.
oh, yeah, oh whoa yeah

I feel connected (connected), protected (protected),
It's like you're standing right with me all the time.
You hear me, you're near me,
And everything else's gonna be alright.
Connected (connected), protected (protected),
It's like you're sitting right with me all the time.
You hear me, you're near me,
And everything else's gonna be alright.

'Cause nothing can break this, nothing can break this, nothing can break this tie.
Connected, connected inside, connected, connected inside, connected.
Oh Yeah![155]

They sing about how they protect each other and their bond is impossible to break. In the first part I saw that they mention that their friendship allows them to get through difficult times, much like in the previous song. Their relationships gives them safety both physically and makes them also feel this way. They further talk about the fact that they were destined to be together and no matter the time they spend apart, they will always find and uplift each other. Lastly, they go as far as to say that their souls are connected and because of that they are never alone, as in spirit, they will always be there for each other and no amount of distance can change that. I think that it can be assumed that not only will the girls never stop being friends and love each other, but also that there is no place for men in their relationship, considering their closeness would be quite impossible to keep up after starting a family and settling down. I see it as another song that sounds more similar to a love song than a friendship song. The girls only have each other and want to spend the rest of their lives together, not willing to sacrifice their closeness for anything or anyone. What I found

[155] Barbie. "Connected." *Genius Lyrics*, <https://genius.com/Barbie-connected-lyrics>. Accessed June 26th, 2023.

interesting is that Lynch and Silva noticed in their article that the song "Connected" is actually a remake of a love song titled "Tenerte y quererte" by a Mexican band RBD where the subjects sing openly that they love each other.[156] I think it is a bold move on Mattel's part to use a love song and use it as a friendship song. Perhaps they counted on the traditionally feminine presentation and assumed heterosexuality would make it easy to get away with using that kind of song and make it appear platonic. This ties in with the lesbian erasure Rich discussed in her essay– the heterosexual majority (in this case Mattel) did not consider lesbian subtext as valid or threatening to the patriarchal society,[157] therefore feeling safe trying to pass a love song as a friendship song.

After their garden is destroyed, they go to the market, trying to sell whatever they managed to salvage. On their way there, they are gifted a mirror by an old woman. As it turns out, there is a muse, Melody, trapped inside it. Once she reveals herself, she asks the girls for help with finding the diamond castle and saving music. Soon into their journey they meet handsome twin musicians, Jeremy and Ian,[158] who are rather cocky, but charming. To me, the boys seem like perfect partners for the girls. The charm, flirtatiousness, looks and wit seem like an ideal mix for a fairytale love interest. Moreover, since they are twins, they could be okay with the quite intense closeness of the two girls. The boys even save them at one point form danger and express clear interest in pursuing them. Alexa and Liana are, however, not really impressed with them and pretty much ignore all their advances, only using their help because it is convenient.

As Lynch and Silva note, the boys' plot is the weakest part of the movie.[159] Beranek further supports this argument pointing out that they serve the role of convenient plot devices, rather then legitimate love interests.[160] They are there when they are needed, but the girls do not find them attractive or even particularly like them. Avila notes that the girls even make fun of the boys. He further points out that they do not provide a strong heterosexual alternative to the girls' relationship, which means that with nothing else to focus on– the

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[156] Katherine Lynch and Carly Silva, "Barbie Movies Ranked According to How Gay They Made Me," *Her Campus*, March 9th, 2021. Available at: <https://www.hercampus.com/school/emmanuel/barbie-movies-ranked-according-how-gay-they-made-me/>, accessed June 7th, 2023.
[157] Adrienne Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," *Signs,* Vol 5, no. 4, 1980, 631-633.
[158] Gino Nichele, *Barbie and the Diamond Castle*, (Mattel Entertainment, Rainmaker Entertainment, 2008). Timestamp: 29:52-31:04.
[159] Katherine Lynch and Carly Silva, "Barbie Movies Ranked According to How Gay They Made Me," *Her Campus*, March 9th, 2021. Available at: <https://www.hercampus.com/school/emmanuel/barbie-movies-ranked-according-how-gay-they-made-me/>, accessed June 7th, 2023.
[160] Aunna Beranek, "'Barbie and the Diamond Castle' Is a Film That Radiates Queerness," *Study Breaks Magazine*, Jul 7th, 2022. Available at: <https://studybreaks.com/tvfilm/barbie-and-the-diamond-castle-is-a-film-that-radiates-queerness/>, accessed Jun 7th, 2023.

queer audience can project their own identity onto the girls.[161] I find this to be a great explanation, as it is true that Liana and Alexa's relationship is the most developed one in the movie, with the heterosexual relationships being extremely marginalized. This idea is further developed by Doty in his book, where he explains that the female audience that watches lesbian and queer-like narratives, unknowingly becomes queer itself, as it starts seeing men as threats to the relationship between their female protagonists. This explains why the boys seem extremely annoying and are so easily disposable in the movie as well as why the LGBTQ+ community especially views them as interrupting the main narrative.[162]

One scene starring the boys and girls is worth mentioning here. After solving the ogre's riddle to save Ian and Jeremy, the girls are rewarded with a rainbow bridge, which leads them straight to the diamond castle. The boys do not make it to the bridge, as it starts to move away from the cliff. As Avila points out, this can be read as a queer metaphor– the rainbow, an LGBTQ+ sign, literally takes the two girls away from their heterosexual potential love interests.[163] I also noticed that once that happens, the boys say "What's wrong with that picture?– Everything," as if acknowledging the homoerotic subtext of it.[164]

Figure 21: Gino Nichele, Barbie and the Diamond Castle, (Mattel Entertainment, Rainmaker Entertainment, 2008). Timestamp: 41:16.

Confused Ian and Jeremy looking at Liana and Alexa, as they are taken away by the rainbow bridge, which could be a metaphor for the girls' sexuality always being in the way of the heterosexual romance they were seemingly meant to experience.

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[161] Alexander Avila, "Overanalyzing the Barbie Movies with Queer Marxist Theory," Jan 21, 2022, (38:07-38:22). Available at: <https://youtu.be/ZION_-IsJro>, accessed June 7th, 2023.
[162] Alexander Doty, *Making Things Perfectly Queer: Interpreting Mass Culture.* (London: University of Minnesota Press (1993), 40-42
[163] Alexander Avila, "Overanalyzing the Barbie Movies with Queer Marxist Theory," Jan 21, 2022, (39:47-39:58). Available at: <https://youtu.be/ZION_-IsJro>, accessed June 7th, 2023.
[164] Gino Nichele, *Barbie and the Diamond Castle*, (Mattel Entertainment, Rainmaker Entertainment, 2008). Timestamp: 41:11-41:16.

Once again, Barbie, who plays Liana in the story, is breaking gender norms by being the braver one, ready to risk it all with no questions asked in the name of friendship and peace. Liana takes initiative every time there is any danger or someone need help. She offers her sandwich to the old poor lady, offers to help Melody find the diamond castle and saves Ian and Jeremy from the ogre, risking her life for them. Even when the evil muse tries to lure Alexa and Liana with everything they dreamed of: a beautiful house, maids, food and garden– Liana again is the more brave of the two, not wanting to give up on their journey, while Alexa is more passive and feminine, wanting to stay and in a way settle down. As I have noticed, Alexa accuses Liana of choosing Melody over her, suggesting a betrayal, or even cheating. Liana responds "It's not like that"[165] and looks down, which almost seems like she is denying infidelity. This fight leads to a fallout between girls and they go their separate ways. In a fit of rage, Alexa takes off her magic necklace, the symbol of their love, as if it was an engagement ring and throws it on the floor.[166] Even though their romantic narrative is rather obvious, the girls might not be perceived as queer or cause outrage, because of lesbian erasure, Adrienne Rich talks about in her essay. The two guys in the movie provide the heterosexual safety net and since society does not see women's romantic relationships as serious or threatening to patriarchy– they are accepted and overlooked.[167] The *Celluloid Closet* movie documentary also talks about this issue, explaining that women's intimacy is more acceptable on screen than one between two men. Their relationship are rather seen as innocent sisterhood or "just a phase" that will eventually pass, once they both find suitable men to fall in love with.[168]

When Alexa gets captured by the movie's villain and falls under her evil spell, Liana has to save her. The two girls eventually get thrown off a bridge, but Liana saves her other half by managing to hold onto a rock and catching Alexa's hand. Once the two are safely on the ground, she lays Alexa down and tries to figure out how to save her. That is when Alexa's dog throws her the magic necklace she threw on the ground before. Liana puts it on her neck and says "Best friends– today, tomorrow and always" while holding Alexa's hand.[169] As soon as she says those words, the curse is broken and her friend becomes conscious again, which

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[165] Gino Nichele, *Barbie and the Diamond Castle*, (Mattel Entertainment, Rainmaker Entertainment, 2008). Timestamp: 45:14-45:19.
[166] Gino Nichele, *Barbie and the Diamond Castle*, (Mattel Entertainment, Rainmaker Entertainment, 2008). Timestamp: 45:47-45:54.
[167] Adrienne Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," *Signs,* Vol 5, no. 4, 1980, 636.
[168] Celluloid Closet
[169] Gino Nichele, *Barbie and the Diamond Castle*, (Mattel Entertainment, Rainmaker Entertainment, 2008). Timestamp: 53:26-53:37.

once again shows the power of friendship, but also their mutual love, which Avila also points out in this video essay.[170]

I noticed that when the girls finally find the diamond castle, they go through a dress transformation into princess dresses, where Liana's dress is in the colors of a lesbian visibility flag and Alexa's dress in a bisexual visibility flag.[171] It seems like the final touch to the homoerotic subtext which has been noticed by the LGBTQ+ community. An even more interesting fact is the choices of dresses. Alexa as a more feminine and passive– is dressed as the bisexual flag, as her personality traits could indicate she might potentially be attracted to men. On the other hand, Liana is a more "masculine" out of the two, playing the role of the traditional male hero, saving Alexa. Therefore, she is too independent for a man, so she has the lesbian flag dress.

The evil muse is another example of a queer villain. She uses her underling, Snider, to do majority of her work,[172] while she sits in her den and plots her plan to take over the Diamond Castle. She has a dark color palette, which features browns, blacks, dark reds and lime green– the color of all her spells. This color choice is from the very beginning supposed to remind the viewer that her power is poisonous, as it closely matches the color of any poisonous gas shown in cartoons, including the gas the fungi spread to immobilize all the fairies in *Barbie:Fairytopia*. Her color palette is very unfeminine, especially compared to all the other female characters. In the scenes where she is shown next to other muses she obviously stands out, with her evil facial expression and harsh makeup. Similarly to Laverna, the evil muse is greedy and is the "bad queer character." She could not coexist with her community despite her difference, so she decided to take the lead and become the most powerful. Laverna tried to take over Fairytopia and challenge her sister for the crown. Both women are queer, by not fitting into the society. They are campy and weird, with a greed for power, which is a rather negative masculine trait. The evil muse is also violent, turning other muses to stone and ordering Alexa to jump of a cliff and kill herself when she did not get from Liana what she wanted. Her masculinity is making her queer, especially in contrast to other female characters, as she mismatches her female body with campy, but masculine colored clothing and masculine personality.[173] While both the main heroines and the other

[170] Alexander Avila, "Overanalyzing the Barbie Movies with Queer Marxist Theory," Jan 21, 2022, (42:08-42:16). Available at: <https://youtu.be/ZION_-IsJro>, accessed June 7th, 2023.
[171] Gino Nichele, *Barbie and the Diamond Castle*, (Mattel Entertainment, Rainmaker Entertainment, 2008). Timestamp: 1:04:39-1:05:07.
[172] Koeun Kim, "Queer-Coded Villains (And Why You Should Care)," *Dialogues@RU*, 2017, 159-160.
[173] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Queer and Now," in *The Routledge Queer Studies Reader*, edited by Donald E. Hall, et al, (New York: Routledge, 2013), 6-7.

muses seem to be completely uninterested in men and are stereotypically feminine looking, the Diamond Castle is acting as a lesbian community center where all members are united by music. The evil muse does not fit this little society, because she does not adhere to the heteronormative fantasy. She does not pretend, letting her true self be displayed for all to see. She knows and feels that due to her difference she is on the bottom of the societal sexual hierarchy Rubin talks about.[174] She crosses the line of ambiguity and enters the territory of an evil lesbian, who hates the world for making her different. One other queer trope she exhibits, is her tragic ending.[175]

In the end, when the battle with the evil muse is done, the girls have a victory dance with Ian and Jeremy, which is the only time they can be seen in a traditional heteronormative scene that was not caused by danger.[176] Interestingly they dance to "Connected," a love song discussed here before. Afterwards, the girls get titled princesses of music and have an opportunity to stay at the castle. However, after the entire journey girls realize that they do not need anything more, beyond their simple life at the cottage. When they announce that, the muses smirk say they were expecting that.[177] This scene in particular felt to me, as if the muses are supposed to represent the queer audience watching this movie. Three adult women living together in a castle, teaching little girls music seem like they also might be uninterested in men. As power figures with all the wisdom and knowledge, it is suggested that they saw through the girls immediately. In the end, Jeremy and Ian do not join the girls. Instead Liana and Alexa go home in a magic carriage alone,[178] which would normally be the ending scene for a prince and princess in a classic fairytale. It is another hint that they were destined to be together, just the two of them and they do not need men. The girls do stay friends with the boys, however, there is no indication that their relationship is romantic. Rather, they continue their "cottagecore lesbian fantasy" life alone. In the end they exercise their postfeminist independence, while staying in touch with Jeremy and Ian keeps the possibility of a future romance in the horizon, even if it is unlikely to happen. What is important is that the girls

[174] Gayle S. Rubin, "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sex," from *Culture, Society and Sexualiy*, London: Routlegde (2006), 151-152.
[175] Rob Epstein and Jeffrey Friedman et al, *The Celluloid Closet,* USA, 1995. Timestamp: (48:28-1:00:00).
[176] Gino Nichele, *Barbie and the Diamond Castle*, (Mattel Entertainment, Rainmaker Entertainment, 2008). Timestamp: 1:10:42-1:11:33.
[177] Gino Nichele, *Barbie and the Diamond Castle*, (Mattel Entertainment, Rainmaker Entertainment, 2008). Timestamp: 1:10:09-1:11:38.
[178] Gino Nichele, *Barbie and the Diamond Castle*, (Mattel Entertainment, Rainmaker Entertainment, 2008). Timestamp: 1:11:44-1:12:08.

exist in the frameworks of heteronormativity, staying within the pyramid of sexuality acceptability hierarchy that Rubin discusses in her essay on radical politics of sex.[179]

Figure 22: Hannah Marder, "Is Barbie Gay? Not Officially, But the Answer's Pretty Obvious," BuzzFeed,

Ian and Jeremy at the Diamond Castle, waving goodbye to Liana and Alexa, who are going back to their cottage in a carriage.

As Avila points out, this movie also does not subvert the feminine hegemony. It shows that being different is okay, but femininity and womanhood have to be fulfilled in order to allow it. I would enrich this conclusion with Zaslow's explanation from her book, where she elaborates that empowerment and autonomy are conditional and promote simplistic narratives of girl power, while not breaking the binary standard.[180] Liana and Alexa are both wearing only dresses throughout the movie, no pants. They both have long hair, which they wear in low knots and after the transformation at the Diamond Castle, their hair is let down. They also wear tiaras, instead of crowns, further showing their femininity. Although Alexa has darker skin tone, perhaps she is even supposed to be black, she still has white features and her skin is just olive. She is one of the first main characters of color introduced to the franchise. The girls color palettes, as previously mentioned, resemble lesbian and bisexual visibility flags, but they are also traditionally feminine. Pink, blue, purple and orange are traditionally feminine colors, featured in many toys targeted to girls.

[179] Gayle S. Rubin, "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sex," from *Culture, Society and Sexualiy*, London: Routlegde (2006), 151-152.
[180] Emilie Zaslow, *Feminism, Inc.: Coming of Age in Girl Power Media Culture,* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 10.

Their outward appearance aligns with the ideal of western femininity, which allows them to act queer, while not threatening the patriarchy.

6. Barbie and the Three Musketeers

The movie is an adaptation of the Three Musketeers story, with the roles of the musketeers being filled by Barbie and her female friends, creating a girl power story with strong female leads. In the beginning of the movie, the viewers are immediately met with Barbie, playing Corinne, who lives on a farm with her mother and dreams of becoming a musketeer one day, just like her father was, so she practices dangerous stunts in a barn every day. Her mom still is not sure of her daughter's choices, as she notes that being a musketeer is a dangerous job, but at the same time, she supports her and has agreed to let her pursue this career a long time ago. One day, Corinne receives a letter from her late father's friend, about a job for her in Paris, so she sets out on a journey to fulfill her dream. She lives by her father's motto "True courage is pursuing your dream, even if everyone else says it's impossible."[181] which is a perfect postfeminist message for young girls, as it promotes perseverance in achieving ones ambitions, no matter what the patriarchal society tells them. Especially told by Barbie, who does everything rather effortlessly and surely while looking amazing and feminine. Femininity being the condition of women's and girls' empowerment according to the postfeminist girl power movement, the movies' main message resonates with its objective of preserving the patriarchal order.[182] On the other hand, this message might be a metaphor for Barbie's queerness, as she from the very beginning faces a struggle to achieve the recognition of her identity, with the society belittling and making fun of her goal. This could be tied with people who struggle with their gender identity and being recognized for their psychological gender.

[181] William Lau, *Barbie and the Three Musketeers*, (Mattel Entertainment and Rainmaker Entertainment, 2009). Timestamp: 05:18-05:28.
[182] Emilie Zaslow, *Feminism, Inc.: Coming of Age in Girl Power Media Culture,* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 10-11.

Corinne travels alone to Paris and arrives dressed quite masculine and standing out from the crowd. In fact, every woman she passes in the city is wearing a dress and bonnet. The girl stands out in her red pants and classy updo. She spots musketeers in one of the streets and tries to challenge them, but unfortunately fails and is belittled by them, getting sexist remarks thrown at her. Once she visits the office of the man who sent her a letter, she is again patronized and made fun of for her ridiculous dream. The musketeers tell her a woman could never have the skills needed for the job and to leave it to the "big boys." Once she is invited by her father's friend to his office, she gives disgusted looks to all the men, showing that she thinks their comments were pathetic. Once she manages to speak to her father's friend, she is told that becoming a musketeer is not an easy task and he pretty much discourages her from pursuing her dream. He explains that she first would need to prove herself with an act of bravery and her loyalty to the kingdom, to even be considered. Without even getting to know her and assessing her skills, the man tells her she is not ready for this.[183] It is quite interesting to see Barbie fight so hard for her dreams and be so obviously assertive. In other movies she is certainly not as persistent and sassy, but rather tries to always be polite and not start any conflict. The viewer would see her pleading and in a calm way, try to persuade her opponent to believe in innocent virtues such as the power of friendship and the pureness of one's heart. Here, her face is much more expressive, often showing annoyance or disgust.

Figure 23: "Barbie and the Three Musketeers," Fanpop,

Corrine riding wearing pants on her horse, setting off to Paris. She is the only female character not wearing a skirt.

[183] William Lau, *Barbie and the Three Musketeers*, (Mattel Entertainment and Rainmaker Entertainment, 2009). Timestamp: 13:16-14:18.

Soon after her unsuccessful visit to the musketeer's office, the audience meets the second female protagonist, a seamstress named Viveca. She loves fashion and considers it the highest form of art that needs to be appreciated and protected. Because of that, she is much more feminine than Corinne, who takes more of the role of a tomboy, clueless about her beauty and with no interest in pursuing a feminine hobby. The next female lead is Aramina, who loves flowers and poetry, she is also much more feminine than Corinne, balancing her out, but also making her look more masculine. Last girl is Renee, who loves music and plays the violin. While chasing her cat and the movie villain's dog, Corinne bumps into all of the girls, destroying something important from each of them, and accidentally gets herself hired at the palace as a maid. Corrine tells her boss that she has a dream of becoming a musketeer, which she laughs at and tells her that women cannot be musketeers and to never mention this again.[184] Once she is hired, she finds out that all the girls actually also work at the castle and will be her coworkers. Unfortunately all of them are also angry with her and seek revenge.

Once Corrine works at the castle, it is acknowledged that one of her coworkers, Aramina finds the prince "dreamy," which is the first attempt to feminize him in the movie. By appreciating his looks, while not knowing him, Aramina objectifies the prince, reversing the gender roles, as it is something a man would usually do to a woman. By expressing sexual interest in him, she takes on a role of a man, which aligns with Jane's theory about gender roles reversal in Barbie movies.[185] This reversal is something that makes the main heroine and the prince appear queer, as they play the roles of the opposite sex in the movies, down to the personality traits. Corrine is the prince in shining armor and Louis is the princess in trouble. Moreover, in contrast to Aramina, simply admires the prince's passion for flying, as it is his dream and he is constantly discouraged from pursuing it. She does not express any sexual or romantic desire towards him, which is even stranger for a woman in traditional tales. Corrine displays one of the most important virtues of a man in the eyes of the patriarchal society– honor. She is there to protect the prince, not use her position and power to intentionally seduce him with her strength.

While watching the prince, the girls witness a chandelier falling from the ceiling and almost crushing him, missing him only by a few inches. The glass and other parts of it fly

[184] William Lau, *Barbie and the Three Musketeers*, (Mattel Entertainment and Rainmaker Entertainment, 2009). Timestamp: 18:03-18:24.
[185] Emma Jane, "'No Bos Olib'– On the Gynocentrism and Sparkly Separatism of the Barbie Movies," *Fusion Journal,* No. 2, 2013.

all around the room and the girls show their amazing battle skills, by managing to hit every single piece coming their way and coming out of the "attack" completely unscathed. While cleaning the mess caused by the chandelier falling on the floor, Corinne has noticed that the rope holding it was cut, which prompts her to start an investigation. The girls start asking Corinne about her coordination and she admits she has always wanted to be a musketeer, which is why she has been training for that role and has such good reflexes. This is the moment when all the girls admit they have secretly been wishing for the same thing for a long time, but have never shared this secret with anyone else. This once again suggests that the girls are more feminine than Corrine who has been shamelessly going around Paris and telling everyone of her socially unacceptable dream. The girls have more knowledge of the social etiquette, since they know that it is improper for a young lady to dream of such a job for herself. In this sense the girls are liberated by the more masculine Corrine, who pays no mind to the patriarchal society, rebelling against it. This might be related to Beauvoir's observation that girls who are raised by their fathers often are more independent and pay less attention to their femininity, which could result in their alienation among other girls, or at least getting a label of an outsider.[186] The motto Corrine lives by, told to her by her father, suggests he played a great role in her life and made sure she would not be constrained by the patriarchal order. This of course by default makes her appear as different in the society. She does not fit in with other women, but is not accepted as an equal with men, which makes her take on the role of *the Other*, a complete misfit in her community. On their reasons for wanting to be musketeers the girls also differ from Corrine, who wants to simply serve and protect the prince, just like her father did. Aramina notes how great it would feel to save the prince and protect him while her physical language indicates she would want this to be the beginning of a romance between them, while Viveca is in love with the musketeers' outfits. Renee on the other hand, finds them to be interesting and admirable, so she looks up to them.[187]

[186] Simone de Beauvoir and H. M Parshley, *The Second Sex*. (London: J. Cape, 1956), 285.
[187] William Lau, *Barbie and the Three Musketeers*, (Mattel Entertainment and Rainmaker Entertainment, 2009). Timestamp: 27:22-28:02.

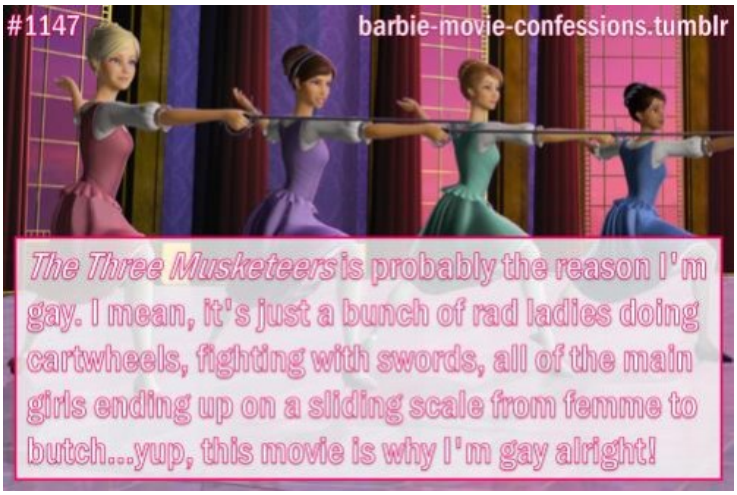

Figure 24: Barbie-movie-confesions, Tumblr,

Corrine and the three musketeers training in hiding. The text on the bottom suggests that the movie was a queer awakening for some viewers, with the girls existing on a thin line between heterosexuality and queerness.

The old maid sees the girls admitting their dreams and takes them to a secret tunnel, leading to an old training room for musketeers. She turns out to actually be a well-trained warrior herself. She agrees to start training them if they follow her orders. This girl-only environment nurtures empowerment, the sense of girlhood and the importance of teamwork. The girls are taught to work together, otherwise they will all fail. Their master is strict and not only teaches them the practical skills, but also good morals. The movie shows how the girls can work hard to achieve their dreams, while staying glamorous, feminine and beautiful, which are the most important ideas of postfeminism according to Rottenberg. Women's independence is strictly tied with her femininity and they have to work together, in order for women to gain a certain level of independence, but not become more powerful than men.[188]

The character of the prince Louis is interesting in this story. The young royal is depicted as rather feminine, only interested in science, particularly creating a hot air balloon. He needs the musketeers to guard him and in fact does not carry any weapon around. He knows latin and loves nature. He is so helpless in fact, that even women of the kingdom have a desire to serve him and protect him, perhaps even mother him. Louis is almost assassinated on many occasions, however, he does not seem to have much of a grasp over the dangerous position he is in, as he lives his life rather cluelessly, carelessly and with only pure appreciation for the beauty of the world. He has to be constantly saved and does not seem to

[188] Sarah Banet-Weiser, et al, "Postfeminism, Popular Feminism and Neoliberal Feminism? Sarah Banet-Weiser, Rosalind Gill and Catherine Rottenberg in Conversation," *Sage Publications,* 21:1, 2020, 7-8.

even mind that a woman does that. When Corinne saves him, he seems to be simply grateful to her. Corinne is a little flustered by him, however, she more appreciates his dreamer nature, but her enthusiasm is quickly extinguished, when she tells him her dream and he makes fun of her. That is a curious moment, because even though Corinne just proved she is just as capable of saving the prince's life as any man, perhaps even more, he still thinks she is unfit of becoming a musketeer. As soon as they land the hot air balloon, Corinne, in a rather unladylike fashion, gives him the piece of her mind and ridicules him for his close mindedness, pointing out that his dream is far more ridiculous, yet he makes fun of her.[189] It seems like even though the prince is not and does not wish to be a particularly masculine and heroic king, he still has sexist beliefs. Perhaps his femininity makes him believe that if he is unable to protect himself then a woman, who theoretically should be even more feminine– could never do it either. His quite extreme feminization has been discussed by Jane in her article on sparkly separatism. As she notes, his femininity is depicted in a negative light.[190] Compared to the hotheaded Corrine, he is gentle and calm, but at the same time clueless and lacks confidence in his abilities. His femininity is making him annoying, especially in comparison to the brave and motivated Barbie.

Figure 25: Barbie-movie-confesions, Tumblr,

Prince Louis talking to Corrine. The text on the bottom compares him to Aiden, suggesting that the characters are more likeable due to their flaws. This might be making male characters less intimidating and more feminine, therefore making them seem more approachable.

Phillippe, the prince's cousin is shown as the toxic masculine villain. He has been condescending to Corinne and her friends from the very beginning. He at times is calling

[189] William Lau, *Barbie and the Three Musketeers*, (Mattel Entertainment and Rainmaker Entertainment, 2009). Timestamp: 38:15-39:27.
[190] Emma Jane, "'No Bos Olib'– On the Gynocentrism and Sparkly Separatism of the Barbie Movies," *Fusion Journal,* No. 2, 2013.

them ridiculous, delusional and patronizes them at every occasion. He truly seems to hate women and seems to display at least one characteristic of a queer villain according to Kim's list. Like most of them, he also sends his minions to do most of his job for him,[191] however, at the same time, he does have the final battle with Corrine alone. Secondly, his fixation with the prince, his cousin who also loves him deeply, is quite homoerotic itself. While his real goal might be the throne, he does have to focus all his attention on Louis in order to get it. This means that he practically follows his every movie and fixates on him in order to eliminate him. This is interesting, as the prince does not actually desire the throne, so if he voiced his wishes more calmly, he might have been able to be elected by negotiation. Unfortunately, Philippe's over exaggerated masculinity, which results in turning to violence, did not allow for this peaceful resolution to happen. When it comes to various Barbie villains, Philippe mostly resembles Wenlock– not exactly conventionally queer, as they are both rather masculine, but still harboring hate towards women. I think that his attitude towards the opposite sex, while not a typical queer characteristic, does imply that he generally has no interest in them. This combined with his obsession with his cousin, could potentially be read as a hint at his non-heteronormativity, perhaps he might be a gay man deep in the closet, projecting his internalized homophobia onto Corrine and her friends with his numerous sexist remarks, because they are brave enough to break out of the patriarchal frames and be who they want to be.

When the girls are banned from the castle after trying to bring the attention of musketeers to the potential deadly plotting against prince Louis, they have to figure out a smart and fashionable way of sneaking into the royal ball. They decide to create costumes which would conceal both their identities and weapons. Viveca becomes the head costume designer, with all girls getting masks and beautiful, but functional gowns. Renee is in charge of creating concealed weapons and Aramina teaches Corinne how to dance, so the girl does not stand out. It is interesting that Corinne has no actual job, as her main task is being a leader to the group. When Aramina gives her dance lessons, it is obvious that she does not initially feel comfortable doing this. Her body is stiff and she is clumsy. She is the least feminine of the four and has very little knowledge about being girly. In fact, she might be the least feminine Barbie character out of all the movies covered in this thesis. She is the only woman seen wearing pants in the movie, she is quite tomboyish and charismatic. However, this scene shows that she would not be able to save the prince if she did not have

[191] Koeun Kim, "Queer-Coded Villains (And Why You Should Care)," *Dialogues@RU*, 2017, 160.

the feminine energy around her from her friends, which once again proves that girl power can only be achieved if the girl is feminine.[192]

Figure 26: Peakpx,

Corrine and her friends dressed in glamorous, but relatively functional musketeer suits at the ball. Unfortunately, under their ballgowns they are wearing just shorter skirts, not pants, which would make them easier to fight in.

To counter Corinne's masculinity, the movie creators decided to dress her in pink (previously she was wearing red the whole time, which stood out from the color palette of the other girls: purple, blue and minty green) and she is the only one with her long hair down. It is almost funny to see the tomboy Corinne in such a pink and glamorous outfit. At the ball, when the prince is choosing a partner, he unsurprisingly goes for her, which is supposed to further feminize her. It can be seen as a patriarchal regress in such a good girl power tale (especially compared to other movies) with a strong, unapologetic female lead. She is again flustered, perhaps a bit awkward to dance with the prince and have all eyes on her. Despite his previous rude comment, she seems to still like him and even have a crush on him, which further ruins her "independent woman that does not need a man" image. This is however countered a little bit, when one remembers that the gender roles in the movie are reversed.[193]

Corrine is queer, because she rebels against the sexist society. She is a tomboy, completely not interested in men, wearing pants and not knowing proper "ladylike" manners. She is still conventionally beautiful, something she cannot change and she also gets a makeover at the end, finally accepting her femininity. However, she is still for most of the movie rebelling against her womanhood with every fiber of her being. She feels like she has to prove her mismatched gender identity,[194] trying very hard to not be contained in the

[192] Emilie Zaslow, *Feminism, Inc.: Coming of Age in Girl Power Media Culture,* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 10-11.
[193] Emma Jane, "'No Bos Olib'– On the Gynocentrism and Sparkly Separatism of the Barbie Movies," *Fusion Journal,* No. 2, 2013.
[194] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Queer and Now," in *The Routledge Queer Studies Reader*, edited by Donald E. Hall, et al, (New York: Routledge, 2013), 6-7.

heteronormative frameworks of society, because she knows that it would mean giving up on her dream forever. Her perseverance places her at the bottom of the sexuality and gender expression hierarchy discussed by Rubin,[195] however, she simply does not care about that. She consciously makes a choice to remain there, hoping the heteronormative and sexist society will eventually see her efforts.

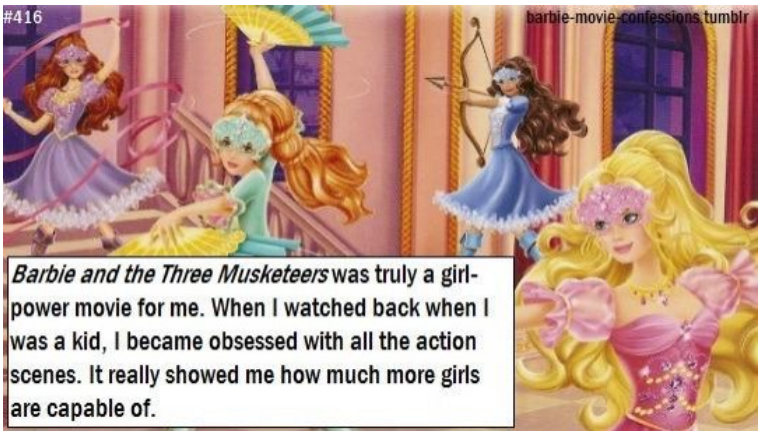

Figure 27: Barbie-movie-confesions, Tumblr,

One of the promotional pictures of the Barbie and the Three Musketeers movie, with the girls at the ball. They look even more girly here, as all of them have thier hair in long ponytails, not updos. Their musketeer suit salso have longer skirts. The bottom text praises the movie for the girl power message.

When the fight scene at the ball breaks out, the girls in a true girl power fashion literally "kick asses" of Philippe's henchmen all to the sound of a remake of “Unbelivable” by EMF, an original song about a demanding girlfriend where the subject is saying "you're unbelievable" to her, to tell her off. Here the songs says "we're unbelievable," showing that the girls are reclaiming the negative image of a “difficult woman.” It is a comedic nod to the parents, as most children watching this movie in 2009 would not be able to recognize the twist of the movie version of this song.[196] In this scene, even Miette, Corinne's cat, beats Philippe's dog, completely emasculating him, despite him always scaring her and having the upper hand, because of his size. The girls prove to be extremely competent in combat, utilizing a variety of different weapons. Even more impressively, which the movie highlights with the specific camera shots, they manage to still remain girly and sexy while fighting.[197] They manage to prove themselves to the musketeers too. Corinne jumps to the prince's rescue

[195] Gayle S. Rubin, “Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sex,” from *Culture, Society and Sexualiy*, London: Routlegde (2006), 151-152.
[196] William Lau, *Barbie and the Three Musketeers*, (Mattel Entertainment and Rainmaker Entertainment, 2009). Timestamp: 1:03:14-1:06:04.
[197] Sarah Banet-Weiser, et al, “Postfeminism, Popular Feminism and Neoliberal Feminism? Sarah Banet-Weiser, Rosalind Gill and Catherine Rottenberg in Conversation,” *Sage Publications,* 21:1, 2020, 7-8.

at the rooftop of the castle and defeats Philippe, finally showing him that she is in fact capable of protecting the prince, which he previously did not believe and ridiculed her for thinking she can do that.

Figure 28: Barbie-movie-confesions, Tumblr,

Corrine in her final fight scene with Philippe. The text on the bottom claims that that scene symbolically defeated patriarchy.

In the end their true identities are revealed and the girls get appointed as musketeers by prince Louis. It is suggested that Corinne and the prince are interested in each other, however, their romance has to wait, as now she is busy with her new duties, getting called to an adventure, when he tries to ask her out for a date. This last scene of the movie shows that she does not let a man stop her from pursuing her dreams. She could have easily settled for a luxurious life by the new king's side, but she never was craving this kind of lifestyle, so she decides to set on another adventure and leave him behind. As barbie-movie-reviews on Tumblr.com notes, Barbie decides to ride off towards the sunset with her three loving girlfriends, as the author suggests the four heroines are in a foursome.[198]

[198] Barbie-movie-reviews, *Tumblr.com*, Apr 14th, 2020. Available at: <https://www.tumblr.com/barbie-movie-reviews/615345461430255616/barbie-and-the-three-musketeers-2009>, accessed June 7th, 2023.

Figure 29: Lgbtbarbie, Tumblr,

A picture review of the movie. The author claims that the movie has a number of gay motifs in it.

As can be seen by the attached pictures, this movie has queer aspects to it. Most of the fans point out that the dynamic of the girls resonates with a lesbian support group or even a foursome. Their little homosexually charged community does resonate with Rich's idea of the lesbian continuum, where women practice lesbian love and through it, fight patriarchy.[199] Unfortunately this is spoiled by Corrine falling in love with the prince, as some queer fans have pointed out. Others praise the movie for having an incredibly strong lead that actively acknowledges sexism and instead of submitting to it, fights with it. Barbie in this movie resembles Nori from *Mermaidia*. She is stubborn and not particularly virtuous. However, she does have a pure heart and even though she is not a walking graceful model of femininity, she still is a girl who is simply driven by her good intentions and dreams she promised her father to never give up on.

[199] Adrienne Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," *Signs*. Vol 5, no. 4, 1980, 648-652.

7. Barbie Dolphin Magic

Barbie Dolphin Magic is a newer film from the franchise, as it was released in 2017. It has a different format than previous movies, as it is an original story and does not follow a fairytale-style plot. It is a modern story, the girls have smartphones and there are no magic kingdoms or evil sorcerers. The only magic involved in the story is the mermaid, Isla, and her dolphin friends. The magic in the movie is characterized by pureness and positivity, while the main villain, who represents corrupt humanity– Marlo, is greedy, but she looks for monetary gain, not power, like most fairytale villains. Although modernity is shown as the source of evil (capitalism = greed), technology is not shown as such. It is rather a device, which is easily used for bad purposes in the hands of people like Marlo, but also can be utilized for doing something good or creating memories, like taking pictures. The movie's plot follows Barbie and her sisters going on vacation to visit Ken at his marine biology internship, meaning all the characters from the Barbie franchise are playing themselves, which is a new concept. Soon, it turns out that Ken's boss, Marlo, has caught a magic dolphin, which is Isla's friend. Because of that, she sets out on a rescue mission and uses a magic necklace to turn into a human, trying to blend into the crowds at the vacation resort Barbie is staying at. The two girls bump into each other and quickly become friends, as they act pretty similar. Isla does not know much about the human world, but tries to act like she belongs, so Barbie unknowingly teaches her everything, not caring much about her cluelessness and silly mistakes, which brings the two closer together.

I think that it is very important to note that Ken is not Barbie's romantic interest in the movie. When introducing him to Isla, she claims that they grew up together and he is like family to the girls.[200] Although it seems like the movie is assuming the audience will read their relationship as "childhood friends that will eventually become lovers, but do not know it yet" it does not explore their romantic relationship at all. Instead, I see that it relies on the idea of compulsory heterosexuality, an implication that Barbie has to end up with him, so this plot does not need to be developed. According to Adrienne Rich, heterosexuality is treated as a default for women, which leads to lesbian erasure.[201] By assuming that Barbie is an inseparable partner of Ken, due to their portrayal as a couple over the years of Barbie's

[200] Conrad Helten, *Barbie Dolphin Magic*, (Rainmaker Studios, Mattel Creations, 2017). Timestamp: 23:11-23:16.
[201] Adrienne Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," *Signs,* Vol 5, no. 4, 1980, 631-633.

existence, the viewers easily can ignore the significance of her relationship with Isla and its romantic potential. Thanks to that, the movie can easily get away with a lot of intimacy between the girls, because Ken is somewhere there in the background, making sure Barbie remains straight. This is another example of not providing alternative heterosexual relationship in the movie that Avila also mentions in his video essay. Because the movie focuses on Barbie and Isla's relationship, the queer audience can project their own identities onto the two girls, with no heterosexual interruptions. As Avila further noticed, the girls' bond is the only intimacy present in the movie, outside of the familial bonds.[202] Even Ken gets "familyzoned," so he is both the heterosexual security for straight and conservative audiences and the unthreatening friend for queer ones.

When Barbie and her sisters find out Isla has no place to stay for the night, they invite her for a sleepover, but due to her lack of knowledge about human customs, she immediately falls asleep and the party the girls were expecting is over. That is where Barbie shows her caring side for a complete stranger and with a tender look on her face, she covers her with a blanket.[203] This is one of their first intimate interactions in the movie and shows how much she likes Isla. In the morning, however, Barbie is the only one who manages to wake her up, by remembering how much she loves sandwiches.[204] This little moment shows how attentive Barbie is to her new friend and how much she cares about her likes and dislikes.

Soon after breakfast the girls have a touching moment swimming. They goof around and have fun, lifting each other up and splashing in the sea. That is when Isla's dolphin friends show up and one of them accidentally turns back into a mermaid in front of Barbie, by rubbing its nose on her magic necklace.[205] She is not scared by the revelation, however, but rather is just curious and surprised, showing acceptance and a lot of excitement. Her reaction, although quite intense for Isla, gives a sense of security and allows her to open up to Barbie and trust her with her secret.

A scene right after Isla's transformation is worth attention, as it has been discussed by the LGBTQ+ community over social media. When Isla turns into a mermaid, Barbie starts asking her a lot of questions, getting closer and closer to her, backing her into a large rock

[202] Alexander Avila, "Overanalyzing the Barbie Movies with Queer Marxist Theory," Jan 21, 2022, (20:47-21:07). Available at: <https://youtu.be/ZION_-IsJro>, accessed June 7th, 2023.
[203] Conrad Helten, *Barbie Dolphin Magic*, (Rainmaker Studios, Mattel Creations, 2017). Timestamp: 27:48-27:54.
[204] Conrad Helten, *Barbie Dolphin Magic*, (Rainmaker Studios, Mattel Creations, 2017). Timestamp: 29:10-29:15.
[205] Conrad Helten, *Barbie Dolphin Magic*, (Rainmaker Studios, Mattel Creations, 2017). Timestamp: 29:52-31:02.

to which she climbs up on, trying to move away from Barbie, as she is a bit nervous. According to Avila's analysis, Isla seems irresistible to Barbie at this scene,[206] as the girl cannot contain her excitement to find out her true identity. The Barbie follows her and the two end up sitting on a rock. The scene did turn rather romantic and intimate at this moment. Barbie sits very close to Isla, who explains that Barbie cannot tell anyone about her secret. She tells her she trusts her, but not everyone is like Barbie and some will try to take advantage of other's specialness. Barbie reassures her, moving her face close to Isla's and looking her in the eyes and says "Don't worry. Your secret is safe with me, I promise," in a gentle tone of voice.[207] As Avila notices, this might be a metaphor for homophobia, or here– "fishphobia."[208] As Isla is worried she will not be accepted for her true self. Same thing can be concluded about the fact that she tells Barbie she is not like others, which might signalize that she sees her as more similar to herself than anyone else she has ever met. The girls' body language is also important here. While Isla is clearly shy and unsure, trying to create distance between her and Barbie initially, the other girl is trying to get closer to her and show her acceptance through that. She also sits close to Isla and maintains eye contact with her, having a gentle look on her face and holding her hand. This scene is very intimate and can be easily read as queer, with Isla's mermaid identity making her different from the humans, as she is trying to blend in with them. This can be a new twist on the queer identity being presented as a monster back in the Hays Code days.[209]

Figure 30: "Barbie Dolphin Magic, IMDb,

Barbie getting closer to Isla , who is sitting on a rock. Barbie's face shows excitement at the revelation about Isla's true identity.

[206] Alexander Avila, "Overanalyzing the Barbie Movies with Queer Marxist Theory," Jan 21, 2022, (24:32-24:42). Available at: <https://youtu.be/ZION_-IsJro>, accessed June 7th, 2023.
[207] Conrad Helten, *Barbie Dolphin Magic*, (Rainmaker Studios, Mattel Creations, 2017). Timestamp: 32:29-33:00.
[208] Alexander Avila, "Overanalyzing the Barbie Movies with Queer Marxist Theory," Jan 21, 2022, (22:24-23:01). Available at: <https://youtu.be/ZION_-IsJro>, accessed June 7th, 2023.
[209] Rob Epstein and Jeffrey Friedman et al, *The Celluloid Closet,* USA, 1995.

After this heartfelt conversation, to lighten up the mood and take off from the heaviness of the situation, Barbie asks Isla if she can teach her how to swim like a mermaid, to which she agrees. She jumps in the water and positions her friend's legs to be more like her tail. Then the two girls swim around holding hands and dancing in the water, accompanied by the lyrics "nothing can get in the way, nothing can tear us down," and "say it loud, say it proud, we gotta live in the moment."[210] This could be a reference to their previous conversation, showing that differences between the girls will not break apart their bond. As well as a promise of being each other's friends forever. They can embrace their true identities and will always find acceptance in one another. Avila notes that their dance is significant here and could be interpreted as a "lesbian initiation dance" of sorts.[211] Silva on the other hand says the water is a metaphor for lesbian desire. I do agree, as the girls dance in the water very close to each other, at times performing movements with one on top of the other, facing each other, just inches away, as if they were simulating a heterosexual intercourse. Their hips are moving closer and further from each other. Other times the girls are holding hands and spinning in circles, or just swimming next to each other.

Figure 31: @sapphicslike, "Barbie Dolphin Magic, 2017," Twitter,

Barbie and Isla dancing suggestively in the water.

[210] Conrad Helten, *Barbie Dolphin Magic*, (Rainmaker Studios, Mattel Creations, 2017). Timestamp: 33:39-34:33.
[211] Alexander Avila, "Overanalyzing the Barbie Movies with Queer Marxist Theory," Jan 21, 2022, (24:43-25:06). Available at: <https://youtu.be/ZION_-IsJro>, accessed June 7th, 2023.

After finding out Marlo is a villain and she wants to exploit Isla's dolphin friends, Barbie goes to apologize to her, because she did not trust her instinct to not trust the researcher. Isla and Barbie have another heartfelt moment on the rock and make up. Then Isla thanks the girl and her sisters, as well as Ken for help with saving the dolphins and being good friends to her, putting an emphasis on her gratitude towards Barbie. Feeling the time pressure to escape the enclosure with the dolphins, Isla gives her a part of her magic shell. She claims that this is what mermaids use to find each other, but the shell should work for friends of mermaids too, which shows how strong the bond between the girls has become, as she is confident it will guide her through the tunnels to Barbie. Once under water, the shells become joined by a strand of light (which coincidentally also is in colors of the bisexuality visibility flag), which looks like it is going from Barbie, straight to Isla's heart, since the other shell is on her necklace and rests over her chest.[212] It is a literal visualization of their relationship, as the magic would not work, if the two were not close. Isla makes it out the tunnels, but she still has to escape Marlo, because she is following her and is not going to give up easily. The girls say their goodbyes and tell each other how much they will miss one another. Then, when Isla's secret is revealed to the movie's villain, Barbie sacrifices herself and pretends to be a mermaid, to confuse Marlo. She is caught by her in a net, which allows Isla to safely escape.[213] It is a dangerous act, as she has to swim like a sea creature and is then lifted from the water by a helicopter in just a net. Despite that, she puts herself in danger to save her friend.

It is important to also note that Marlo is another type of a queer coded villain. As Avila notes, she is the "bad type of gay" to the good type– Barbie and Isla. Marlo's queerness starts at her looks. She has short, rather masculine hair in comparison to all other female characters and more similar to Ken's. She also constantly wears a diving suit's top and a pair of shorts that resemble men's swim shorts. Her color palette is generally assigned to men in movies, featuring light and dark shades of blue, yellow and dark red. Her face is not very feminine, due to constantly angry or annoyed facial expression, which are typically masculine coded emotions. As Kim mentions in her essay, another important feature of a queer character is their body language.[214] Here also, Marlo does not adhere to the gender binary, as she mostly stomps, rather than walk calmly like other women in the movie. Again,

[212] Conrad Helten, *Barbie Dolphin Magic*, (Rainmaker Studios, Mattel Creations, 2017). Timestamp: 47:45-52:09.
[213] Conrad Helten, *Barbie Dolphin Magic*, (Rainmaker Studios, Mattel Creations, 2017). Timestamp: 56:00-57:38.
[214] Koeun Kim, "Queer-Coded Villains (And Why You Should Care)," *Dialogues@RU*, 2017, 160.

here her body language is again more angry, aggressive and masculine. She is simply coming off as a stereotypical angry butch lesbian, which Lynch and Silva also notice in their article. They further elaborate that it is an example of demonization of masculine women and explain that it happens because Barbie franchise is overly feminine and praises only pink glamour.[215] This means that Barbie's and Isla's queerness is valid and acceptable only because they are very feminine presenting, with their long hair, cute girly faces and pinky color palettes. Similarly, Jagose explains that women's queerness was not recognized for a very long time by the patriarchal society, but when it finally got recognition it is demonized.[216] Similarly, Barbie and Isla are not recognized for their homosexual dynamic, because they are girly, but Marlo can easily be, because she is masculine. On top of that, the movie's villain is characterized by greed, as mentioned before. It is an assumption the human characters make that marine biologists are supposed to help animals and marine life. However, Marlo wants to sell the magic dolphin and get rich. Her intentions, therefore, are not pure and righteous, but instead selfish. Moreover, as Isla finds out, Marlo captures various sea creatures and studies them. The mermaid is appalled by that and finds it extremely concerning. This could be an extension of the fishphobia-homophobia metaphor, specifically the medicalization of homophobia. As Jagose explains in her essay, in the late 19th century, with the medicalization of sexuality, the terms for homosexuality and heterosexuality were invented. Isla's attitude suggests the same type of concern to Marlo's actions, as a gay person might have after hearing someone in a conservative community is being put through conversion therapy– she thinks it is wrong. Another feature of Marlo's queerness is her voice, which is deeper and masculine. As Kim explains in her essay, queer characters often have voiced of the opposite gender, in the case described in her work, Him has higher pitched voice than other male character.[217] Similarly, Marlo's deeper voice makes her seem more masculine and therefore– predatory.

[215] Katherine Lynch and Carly Silva, "Barbie Movies Ranked According to How Gay They Made Me," *Her Campus*, March 9th, 2021. Available at: <https://www.hercampus.com/school/emmanuel/barbie-movies-ranked-according-how-gay-they-made-me/>, accessed June 7th, 2023.
[216] Annamarie Jagose *Queer Theory: An Introduction,* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 13-15.
[217] Koeun Kim, "Queer-Coded Villains (And Why You Should Care)," *Dialogues@RU*, 2017, 160.

Figure 32: "Marlo Buchnan," AntagonistWiki,

Marlo chasing Isla in the helicopter. She is driven by her greed.

At the end of their trip, Barbie decides to try to use the magic shell Isla gave her, to say goodbye to her one last time. She sends the light strand towards the sea, but her friend does not appear. Sad and disappointed Barbie sits on the beach and says: "I miss you Isla." Suddenly Isla appears and the girls hug all happy. Isla thanks her for not giving up, to which Barbie responds "I would never give up on my sister of the sea."[218] In the end, Barbie does not develop any romance with Ken, even though they play themselves in the movie and Barbie as a character has been in an on-and-off relationship with him for decades. She instead focuses all her attention on Isla, while Ken does not even play an important role in the movie, except for being an excuse for the general plot of it (Barbie visits him and he works for Marlo). Barbie's character once again shows very little interest in men, while giving all her focus to women. Not only does she barely spend time with Ken, but she talks to him even less. In fact, it seems that he has more interactions with Barbie's sisters, rather than her, which puts a huge distance between them and further solidifies his role as just the family friend.

[218] Conrad Helten, *Barbie Dolphin Magic*, (Rainmaker Studios, Mattel Creations, 2017). Timestamp: 58:55-59:34.

Figure 33: Hannah Marder, "Is Barbie Gay? Not Officially, But the Answer's Pretty Obvious," BuzzFeed,

Barbie and Isla going for a hug, with their faces really close to each other. The text above suggests that the frame was put there intentionally, as queer subtext.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this thesis has provided an extended queer academic analysis of the selected titles from the Barbie movie franchise. It has depicted the evolution of Barbie's character and how the narratives of the movies have changed too, due to the postfeminist girl power movement growing in its influence and popularity in kids' media in the 2000s, which has, according to my research, not really been done before, especially in combination with queer analysis and in such a lengthy work. The thesis proves that the postfeminism and neoliberal feminism have lead to Barbie becoming sexually ambiguous and easy to read as queer.

Starting with *Barbie as the Princess and the Pauper* released in 2004, Barbie's fate was still to marry a man, however, in a double ceremony with her best friend and soulmate Erika, linking both girls fate for life. As marriage is assumed to be an unbreakable bond in fairytales, both girls being at the altar together, assume they will also fall under the same rules. Further in *Barbie and the Magic of Pegasus*, Annika is weary of Aiden for most of the movie, exercising her independence at every possible moment. Only once he starts seeing her as an equal does their romantic relationship blossom. Aiden is also not a perfect prince charming, as he is a gambler and it is Annika, who helps him overcome his problem and motivates him to fix his relationship with his family. While not physically rescued, Aiden's humanity and honor is saved by the young female protagonist. In the end the movie does not show them join the institution of marriage, but it is implied they will eventually tie the knot.

Progressing with the lessening of the importance of men in the narratives, *Barbie: Fairytopia* introduces a disabled fairy, who has to save her land from greedy Laverna. Despite her physical impairment, she perseveres and does not give up, showing her bravery every step of her journey. This time Barbie has no romantic interest at all and is simply depicted as an outcast. Her story, however, does not end there, as Laverna strikes again sending her queer minions to destroy fairytopia and save her from exile, giving Elina an opportunity to find her own happiness by the side of a sassy female mermaid. As the girls set on a mission to rescue Mermaidia's helpless prince, Nalu, they grow closer together, showing the progression of their "rivals to lovers" relationship. As Nori "friendzones" Elina in the end, professing her feelings to Nalu and him reciprocating them, the fairy heroine goes back to her homeland and perhaps her one true love: Dandelion.

Later in *Barbie and the Diamond Castle*, released in 2008, Barbie plays the role of Liana, who leads a "cottagecore fantasy" lifestyle with her best friend, soulmate and potential lover, Alexa. Although the girls are dirt poor, they continuously claim that they already have all that they need: each other. Everything else is just an addition. While on their journey to save the Diamond Castle and all music, the girls meet two male interests, who ironically do not interest them at all. As they face a potential breakup due to an extramarital affair between Barbie and Melody, they eventually learn that they complete each other and need one another to thrive. In the end the girls reject all societal expectations for two fairytale heroines, leaving both the wealth and their potential romantic male interests behind, subsequently exercising their autonomy and self-sufficiency. Similarily, Barbie and Isla do not find any men appealing, as Ken is reduced to an almost family member. The girls are only focused on each other and Barbie is determined to help her new female interest. Their relationship progresses extremely fast, as in a stereotypical lesbian fashion the girls are inseparable and ready to practically move in and start a new life together after knowing each other for two days. In fact, their souls are so closely connected that they can find each other, despite the greatness of the distance.

Lastly, *Barbie and the Three Musketeers* explores a more stubborn and sassy incarnation of Barbie, who this time plays Corrine, the daughter of the main hero of the original story: D'Artagnan. The movie touches upon the struggles of young and ambitious women in a highly patriarchal society, with Corrine transforming from a tomboyish country girl into a glamorous musketeer, adored by the prince, but never giving up on her dream. At the end of the movie the young heroine, after being unappreciated for her aspirations and skills, finally gets what she wanted and chooses her dream career over a lavish lifestyle at the castle and a queen title. She is shown to not be shallow, lazy and superficial, as all of those characteristics are unfit for a proper postfeminist girl power heroine.

One of the main points of this thesis is that Barbie's postfeminist girl power image, which drives her away from heterosexual romance and closer to the male-like strength and appreciation for her female companions, gives an opportunity to read her as queer, especially in the eyes of queer audiences which do not have many representations in the popular culture to begin with. At the same time, the patriarchal society Barbie and her consumers live in, has a huge problem of the erasure of lesbian existence and invalidation of lesbian experience. Because of that, the heterosexual majority does not see such close female relationships, such as ones portrayed in the franchise as a serious threat to the societal order. It seems like the characters in the movies would have to be the flashiest queers and lesbians on the planet,

screaming about kissing girls and gay marriage in order to be seen. Their traditionally feminine image and love professed only between the lines allow them to freely exist within the heterosexist society without threatening it, which is of course problematic from the equality and queer acceptance standpoint.

It is important to remember that while the movies seemingly challenge patriarchy, by presenting a heroine who exhibits masculine traits, it does not subvert or challenge the heteronormative order or patriarchy. Barbie exists on a thin line, balancing between being "scandalous" and "deviant" and being a heterosexual woman. The movies show that if she leaned slightly more into masculinity (either with her personality or looks), she would become a villain, or a "bad queer." An instant in the *Barbie and the Magic of Pegasus*, when Annika tries to defeat Wenlock driven by anger and wishing death upon him is a great example of that, as the Wand of Light did not work that time. Another example is the character of Marlo from *Barbie Dolphin Magic*, who is a stereotypical butch lesbian, which is just a little too masculine, while Barbie's and Isla's close relationship which also points at them being lesbians, is considered okay, because they can simply pass for very close straight friends, by looking stereotypically feminine. The movies show and prove time and time again to their audiences that as soon as someone is too forward with their queerness, breaking the illusion of a "perfect" and homogenous heterosexist society, they become ugly inside and out. By suddenly presenting negative queer stereotypes in all the characters who are challenging gender roles a little too much, the message becomes clear: if one keeps the illusion of heteronormativity, they will be accepted. Another example of this could be Laverna, who was too greedy and evil (which are masculine traits) to remain in the society. She claims to have always been different, much like Elina, but her bitterness changed her into a queer villain, while Elina fits into the fairy society in every way she can, compensating for her lack of wings with her intellect, bravery and a good heart.

The Barbie movie franchise practices simply a reversal of gender roles, while still protecting patriarchy. By attaching feminine traits to men and masculine traits to women, the movies still keep the order of the heteronormative society, the only thing that changes is the body of a character. As children are culturally considered to be asexual and to a certain extent sexless, the sexes of the characters do not really matter, as long as masculine traits are mostly seen as positive, especially "hero traits," like bravery, courage, perseverance and righteousness, while feminine traits are mostly negative (vanity, fearfulness). Negative masculine traits, like anger and greed, are not condoned, which is understandable, as children's media cannot promote that.

Because of that, the media does not subvert or challenge the heteronormative order of the society. It still praises heterosexuality and moderation in gender expression. For example, a man can be well dressed like Annaliese's tutor in *Barbie as the Princess and the Pauper*, but cannot be too fixated on his looks, like Preminger or Max form *Barbie Fairytopia: Mermaidia*. Or another one: a woman can be queer, if she is also very stereotypically feminine.

It is important to consider, looking at the results of this analysis, what messages do children's media deliver to the young audiences. The strict rules of gender expression presented in a more subtle way in the Barbie movies, can have a great impact on them and how they see and categorize people who do not fit in. Queerness and non-normative gender expression is not the only concern here, as this logic can nurture exclusion of all types of difference, including physical appearance, interests, family models and so on. I think that Barbie's franchise could take steps in making itself more inclusive and rely less on negative stereotypes, which support the patriarchy. It could help to have a wider variety of character models, with big ugly noses, evil eyebrows and masculine, dark color palettes not being only assigned to villains but also others, while the rest of the characters are cute and conventionally pretty. Another idea could be to not relying on lesbian erasure as a means for the audience to assume that Barbie is straight. Further, it would be good to create more villains who would fit into the queer villain stereotype. All of these could lead to more inclusive and less judgmental storylines, subsequently leaving a positive impact on children or at least do less damage.

This study is mostly limited by the amount of material possible to analyze. The franchise consists of around 40 titles as of today and is constantly growing. I had to hand select the movies, which was guided by the amount of queer online analysis available. This means that this study could have omitted a certain title that might have been valuable to the thesis or change its outcomes, because I simply did not have access to the readings done on it, due to geolocation limitations of my internet search engines or not knowing about a certain forums I should look on. Despite that I think that this study has proved its point and its findings are still valid. If I could take it further, I would have examined more movies, including those from the beginning of the franchise and more recent ones. I would also investigate the social media claims of queer producers and employees of Mattel, about them inserting queer subtext into many toy lines on purpose. I would also like to explore the impact the movies had on the sales of the company, perhaps conduct interviews with the

people who grew up with Barbie, as well as their legal guardians at the time and find out their thoughts about the franchise.

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