

## INTRODUCTION

Films, with their complex narrative and film-style constructions, are used as a tool to convey messages about human social reality conditions, such as women's empowerment. Women's empowerment is an important issue because of the ongoing problem of gender inequality around the world, as shown by the fact that only 10% of the world's Heads of State are women, girls aged 10-14 are twice as likely as boys to spend time on household chores, and during the COVID-19 pandemic, more adult women reported feeling emotionally stressed and taking on extra household responsibilities than men (Focus 2030, 2024; UNICEF Data, 2024). Empowerment required in this meaning can be the concepts of women recognizing power imbalances, asserting the right to social equality, and advocating for structural changes and collective power in their own lives (Cornwall, 2016). In doing so, films can contribute significantly to enhancing the broader discussion on empowerment and gender, as portrayed in the ideas of the world's most famous doll movie, *Barbie* (2023).

One recently acclaimed film is the live-action movie *Barbie* (2023), directed by Greta Gerwig and co-written by her and Noah Baumbach. Produced by David Heyman, Margot Robbie, Tom Ackerley, and Robbie Brenner, the movie was officially distributed internationally by Warner Bros. Pictures in July 2023. The film has obtained worldwide attention, securing 203 awards and receiving 423 nominations (IMDb, n.d.). This movie talks about Barbie's journey to overcome her issue of facing the unexpected existential crisis to undertake empowerment actions with Gloria, fellow Barbies, and other characters, ultimately reclaiming their peace and autonomy of Barbie Land from the forced replacement to patriarchal system brought by Kens. This movie embodies the theme of women's empowerment through characters of Barbie, Gloria, Sasha, Weird Barbie, and others in Barbie Land. Each character in the film shows strength and power as a woman and collectively goes against traditional patriarchal ideas imposed by men, which have persistently oppressed women, keeping them in a state of lower status and control (Huang et al., 2023). The movie not only shows diverse characters with representation of women of different races but also discusses feminist ideas, promoting fairness and equal opportunities in areas usually dominated by men, as

portrayed in the literary work of the movie. This highlights the theory that is in line, stating that literature is born from actual events in society (Taum, 1997; Wellek & Warren, 1997).

Before Barbie was recently made into a big-screen live-action movie version produced by Greta Gerwig, Barbie has always been there in girls' childhood memories and moments since its creation by American businesswoman Ruth Handler in 1959. As the world's most famous doll, Barbie has become a cultural icon, standing in for many facets of femininity and identity for a generation of girls. This prior claim makes Barbie a unique and fresh symbol for exploring themes of women's empowerment in contemporary media. The movie *Barbie* (2023) builds on this idea, offering a modern take on the character that reflects evolving societal views on gender roles and, especially, women's empowerment as its central theme. The concept of women's empowerment in the movie is set against the backdrop of Hollywood and contemporary social discussions, initially represented through the iconic motto, "If Barbie can be anything, women can be anything." This highlights that women can achieve their aspirations through their own abilities. The film portrays empowerment as a dynamic concept shaped by shifting social norms and diverse cultural contexts.

As a female student, my motivation to research women's empowerment arises from my personal interest and academic curiosity. Being a young woman in today's society, it is understandable how media representations affect our ideas of gender roles and power. The portrayal of women in popular culture, particularly in influential films like *Barbie* (2023), offers valuable insights into how women's empowerment is defined and communicated to audiences. In order to gain a deeper understanding of the cultural messages being conveyed and their implications for young women, including myself, this research seeks to address the following question: How is women's empowerment portrayed in *Barbie* (2023)?