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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Perfectionism and Gender Dynamics in Greta Gerwig's *Barbie* and Patty Jenkins' *Wonder Woman*

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Abstract: This study examines the portrayal of perfectionism and gender dynamics in *Barbie* and *Wonder Woman*. It utilizes Greimas's Actantial Model and an intrinsic narrative analysis to explore how both films depict these themes. *Barbie* and *Wonder Woman* investigate the societal roots of perfectionism and its effects, offering distinct perspectives on gender roles, expectations, and power structures. A qualitative methodology, applied in this study, enables an in-depth analysis of shaping the protagonists' identities. The findings reveal that both films challenge traditional norms and empower their female leads, demonstrating how media critiques and redefines cultural perceptions of gender and perfectionism. Ultimately, this study underscores film's potential as a tool for raising awareness and fostering positive social change, emphasizing its role in shaping discourse around gender expectations and the pursuit of perfection.

Keywords: Perfectionism; Gender Dynamics; Films; *Barbie*; *Wonder Woman*.

Perfeksionisme dan Dinamika Gender dalam *Barbie* dan *Wonder Woman* Karya Greta Gerwig dan Patty Jenkins

Abstrak: Penelitian ini mengkaji penggambaran perfeksionisme dan dinamika gender dalam film *Barbie* dan *Wonder Woman*. Dengan menggunakan Model Aktansial Greimas dan analisis naratif intrinsik untuk mengeksplorasi bagaimana kedua film tersebut menggambarkan tema-tema tersebut. *Barbie* dan *Wonder Woman* menggali akar sosial dari perfeksionisme dan dampaknya, menawarkan perspektif yang berbeda mengenai peran gender, ekspektasi, dan struktur kekuasaan. Metodologi kualitatif memungkinkan analisis mendalam tentang pembentukan identitas protagonis. Temuan penelitian ini mengungkapkan bahwa kedua film tersebut menantang norma-norma tradisional dan memberdayakan pemeran utama perempuannya, menunjukkan bagaimana media mengkritik dan mendefinisikan ulang persepsi budaya tentang gender dan perfeksionisme. Pada akhirnya, penelitian ini menggarisbawahi potensi film sebagai alat untuk meningkatkan kesadaran dan mendorong perubahan sosial yang positif, dengan menekankan perannya dalam membentuk wacana seputar ekspektasi gender dan upaya mencapai kesempurnaan.

Kata kunci: Perfeksionisme; Dinamika Gender; Film; *Barbie*; *Wonder Woman*..

Introduction

Perfectionism and gender dynamics are deeply ingrained in societal narratives and cultural norms, shaping expectations and behaviors across genders. Films, as cultural artifacts, often reflect and critique these dynamics. Greta Gerwig's *Barbie* (2023) and Patty Jenkins' *Wonder Woman* (2017) are two pivotal films that address these themes through their protagonists, narrative arcs, and visual storytelling. While differing in tone, setting, and genre, both films interrogate the pressures of perfectionism and the complexities of gender dynamics in ways that resonate with contemporary audiences.

Perfectionism, as a psychological and sociocultural concept, refers to the relentless pursuit of flawlessness and the imposition of unrealistically high standards. In the context of gender, it often manifests in the expectations placed on women to embody societal ideals of beauty, behaviour, and success. Burns (1980, p. 35) defines perfectionism as “a script for self-defeat,” where individuals strive for unattainable ideals, leading to feelings of inadequacy and failure. This is particularly evident in Gerwig's *Barbie*, where the titular character begins as an idealized symbol of perfection, embodying society's impossible standards of beauty, behavior, and success. As Gerwig (2023) notes, the film explores “*the contradictions of being a woman, the impossibility of being perfect while being everything to everyone, all at once*” as cited in McKeown, (2023).

Furthermore, feminist theorists argue that such expectations are reinforced by patriarchal systems that demand compliance with rigid gender roles, perpetuating the notion that women's worth is tied to their ability to meet these standards. Similarly, Frost, Marten, Lahart, and Rosenblate (1990, p.451) argue that perfectionism is multidimensional, with “socially prescribed perfectionism” being a major factor influenced by societal expectations. This theme resonates with *Barbie*'s critique of how women are conditioned to aspire to perfection, as well as *Wonder Woman*'s portrayal of Diana, who struggles with balancing her Amazonian ideals of flawlessness with the imperfection and complexity of humanity Gill (2017).

Gender dynamics, on the other hand, encompass the interactions and power relationships between genders in personal, societal, and institutional contexts. Mulvey (1975, p.7) asserts that “in a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female”. However, *Barbie* and *Wonder Woman* challenge this traditional male gaze by presenting strong, complex female protagonists who subvert the notion of passivity. Jenkins (2017) explains that her goal in *Wonder Woman* was “not about making a statement about women being better than men. It was about women being equal to men and being allowed to express their own forms of power” as cited in Hark (2017, p. 44).

Both films also critique the patriarchal systems that perpetuate inequality and limit women's agency. Tasker and Negra (2007, p.2) argue that feminist media often “oscillates between empowering female protagonists and reinforcing the very systems they seek to critique”. In *Barbie*, this is evident in Ken's adoption of patriarchy, a system that ultimately harms both men and women. Similarly, *Wonder Woman* juxtaposes the matriarchal utopia of Themyscira with the male-dominated world of World War I, highlighting the disparities in gender power dynamics.

Structuralism, an intellectual movement that emerged in the early 20th century, focuses on understanding the underlying structures that shape human culture, language, and society. This approach emphasizes that meaning is not inherent in isolated elements but is instead constructed through their relationships within a larger system. Structuralism seeks to uncover the deeper, often unconscious, structures that govern how people communicate, interpret the world, and construct knowledge. The movement spans across various disciplines, including linguistics, anthropology, psychology, and literary theory, with its most significant contributions arising from the work of Ferdinand de Saussure, Claude Lévi-Strauss, and A.J. Greimas.

Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913), a Swiss linguist, is considered the founding figure of structuralism, particularly in the field of linguistics. His theories on language radically shifted the way scholars approached the study of linguistic meaning. Prior to Saussure, language was viewed as

a mere collection of words and meanings. Saussure, however, proposed that language functions as a **system of signs**, where the relationship between a word and its meaning is not fixed but rather dependent on the system of differences within the language itself.

Building on Saussure's linguistic theory, narrative structuralism seeks to apply structuralist principles to the analysis of narrative texts whether in literature, myth, or other forms of storytelling. Scholars such as Roland Barthes and Claude Lévi-Strauss extended structuralist ideas to explore how narratives convey meaning through underlying structural rules and systems. They argued that narratives are composed of specific elements, such as characters, events, and themes, which are interconnected in ways that contribute to the overall meaning of the story.

In narrative structuralism, meaning is not simply derived from the individual actions or experiences of characters but from the relationships between elements within the narrative. One key concept in narrative structuralism is binary opposition, a structuralist tool used to identify contrasting pairs of terms or concepts that organize the structure of a narrative. For instance, in many narratives, the opposition between good and evil, life and death, or freedom and oppression shapes the development of the story. These binary oppositions define the roles of characters, the conflicts in the story, and the eventual resolution of the plot.

Additionally, narrative structuralism pays close attention to how these oppositions create meaning not only within individual stories but across entire cultures. For example, Lévi-Strauss's analysis of myths across different societies revealed that, despite variations in cultural context, many myths share similar structural patterns, such as recurring oppositions Lévi-Strauss (1963). This suggests that human cognition and culture are shaped by common, underlying structures that govern storytelling and meaning-making across time and space.

A.J. Greimas, a French semiotician, expanded upon Saussure's linguistic theory and Lévi-Strauss's ideas in narrative analysis with his actantial model, which categorizes the roles characters play in a narrative. Rather than focusing on specific individual characters, Greimas proposed that every narrative consists of actants, which are abstract roles or functions in the story that drive the action. Greimas identified six primary actants, which function as structural roles within any narrative as follows:

1. **Subject:** The character or entity that pursues a goal (e.g., the protagonist).
2. **Object:** The goal or prize that the subject seeks (e.g., a treasure, a resolution).
3. **Sender:** The entity that initiates or motivates the subject's quest (e.g., a mentor or a call to action).
4. **Receiver:** The character or entity that ultimately benefits from the subject's success (e.g., the person who gains from the achievement).
5. **Helper:** A figure that supports or aids the subject in reaching their goal (e.g., a friend or magical helper).
6. **Opponent:** A force or character that opposes the subject and prevents them from achieving their goal (e.g., a villain or antagonist).

Greimas's Actantial Model emphasizes the relationships between these roles rather than focusing on individual characters themselves. This model helps map out the functional structure of a narrative, showing how the interactions between actants create the tension and resolution within the story.

Furthermore, intrinsic elements are fundamental components that contribute to the construction of a literary work, shaping its internal structure and meaning. These elements are concerned solely with the content of the work itself, independent of external factors such as historical context or authorial intent (Sukada, 2013). They include a range of features that directly influence how the story is told and perceived by the audience. Among these elements are the plot, characterization, theme, setting, point of view, and language or style of writing.

The intrinsic approach in literary analysis, however, focuses on examining the internal elements of a narrative to understand its structure, meaning, and artistic qualities. This approach is grounded in the belief that a literary work can be fully understood by analyzing its intrinsic

components, such as plot, character, setting, theme, point of view, and style, without relying on external factors like the author's biography, historical context, or sociopolitical influences (Chatman, 1978). By focusing solely on the narrative itself, the intrinsic approach provides a deeper insight into how the story is constructed and how its elements work together to convey meaning.

According to Meister (2005), the intrinsic approach emphasizes analyzing the text's formal elements and structure, which includes narrative techniques and devices like narrative voice, focalization, and narrative time. These elements reveal how the author crafts the narrative and how the reader interprets it. Chatman (1978) further argues that the intrinsic analysis provides a self-contained framework for interpreting a narrative, where understanding the plot and character relationships within the structure of the story is central to appreciating the work as a cohesive artistic whole

The representation of women in media often reflects societal expectations and reinforces gender norms, creating narratives that perpetuate unrealistic ideals of perfection and strongly established gender dynamics. Both *Barbie* (2023) by Greta Gerwig and *Wonder Woman* (2017) by Patty Jenkins address these issues, highlighting the tension between the pursuit of perfection and the societal structures that define gender roles. Despite the growing emphasis on feminism and equality in popular culture, these films reveal the persistent challenges women face in navigating societal expectations, particularly the pressure to meet unattainable standards of perfection while resisting the limitations imposed by patriarchal systems. This research focuses on two significant films, *Barbie* and *Wonder Woman*, which each tackle the complexities of perfectionism and gender dynamics through distinct storytelling techniques. By examining these films, it uncovers the underlying messages about perfectionism and gender roles. Through the problem identification above, the research questions are:

1. How perfectionism is presented in *Barbie* and *Wonder Woman*?
2. How are gender dynamics described in *Barbie* and *Wonder Woman*?

According to the research questions above, the objective of this research are; to show perfectionism in *Barbie* and *Wonder Woman* and to describe gender dynamics in *Barbie* and *Wonder Woman*. Furthermore, this research aims to explore how perfectionism and gender dynamics are portrayed in *Barbie* and *Wonder Woman*. Its significance lies in examining how both films critique these themes through their setting, plot, character and characterization. By analyzing *Barbie* and *Wonder Woman*, this research provides a deeper understanding of feminist film theory and the cultural implications of perfectionism and gender representation in contemporary cinema. Furthermore, it sheds light on the broader cultural and societal impacts of these portrayals, offering a lens to analyze the evolving dynamics of gender in the 21st century.

Research Method

This research employs a qualitative approach to explore perfectionism and gender dynamics in Greta Gerwig's *Barbie* (2023) and Patty Jenkins' *Wonder Woman* (2017). According to Denzin and Lincoln (2018), qualitative research is an efficient method for investigating cultural works like films, with an emphasis on interpretation and meaning-making during the process. The research approach that has been chosen is both comprehensive and flexible, making it possible to conduct an analysis that takes into account the complexity of perfectionism and gender dynamics while also allowing for the research to evolve as new insights are discovered.

This study's instrument was using Greimas's Actantial Model to provide a systematic way to break down a narrative by identifying six fundamental roles within the story: the **subject**, **object**, **sender**, **receiver**, **helper**, and **opponent**. These actants reveal the driving forces behind the plot and uncover the relationships between characters and the challenges they face. Moreover, combining with the intrinsic approach to emphasize the analysis of the internal elements of the text itself such as plot, setting, character and characterization without considering external factors like historical

context or audience reception. By using both Greimas’s actantial model and intrinsic approach the researcher can explore both films through narrative structures and internal cinematic elements.

In addition, the research was conducted over a four-month period, from August to November 2024. The analysis was carried out remotely, utilizing digital platforms for accessing the films, academic databases for literature review, coding and note-taking and data analysis tools. While the study provides a detailed analysis of two films, its scope is limited to their representations of perfectionism and gender dynamics.

Results and Discussion

Greimas’s Actantial Model of Perfectionism and Gender Dynamics in Barbie (2023) and Wonder Woman (2017)

1. Barbie (2023)

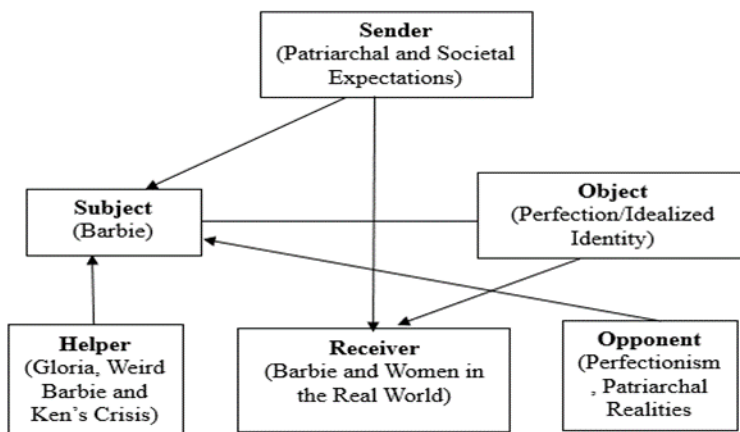


Diagram 1

Actantial Model of Perfectionism in *Barbie*

Description of the Actant’s diagram 1: the **Subject** of the film is Barbie played by Margot Robbie. Barbie presents the idealized woman, designed to embody perfection in her looks and life. However, this perfection does not come from her own desires but is shaped by society’s expectations of women. These expectations force her, like many women, into a rigid mold where value is tied to appearance, success, and control over every aspect of life. The **Object** is perfection. Barbie’s main focus at the start is to maintain her image as the “stereotypical Barbie,” the perfect version of herself that reflects society’s ideals of beauty and success. Her goal is to stay flawless, always happy, and always in control, embodying what the world expects from her. However, as the story unfolds, she begins to realize that this version of perfection is not only impossible to maintain but also does not make her truly happy or fulfilled. **Sender** of the film is the patriarchal system and societal expectations. Barbie Land appears to be a perfect utopia where everything is flawless, and Barbie is celebrated for being ideal in every way. On the surface, it seems like a happy and empowering place, but this perfection hides the pressures placed on women to always be perfect. However, this reflects the same pressures women face in the Real World, where they are often expected to live up to impossible standards. The **Receiver** Barbie and Women in the Real World. Barbie, like many women in the Real World, is taught by society that she needs to be perfect to feel valued or accepted. This message tells her that her worth depends on how well she meets impossible standards of beauty, success, and happiness. Barbie spends much of her life trying to live up to these expectations, believing that perfection is the only way to gain approval. The **Helper** according to the actant’s diagram above is Gloria, Weird Barbie and Ken’s Crisis. Gloria plays a key role in helping Barbie understand that being imperfect is

a normal and important part of life. Weird Barbie acts as a guide and mentor for Barbie, encouraging her to face her flaws and question the idea of perfection. Ken's identity crisis, initially causing problems, ends up indirectly helping Barbie on her journey. Last, the **Opponent** of Barbie based on the diagram is perfectionism and patriarchal realities. Perfectionism is one of the main challenges Barbie faces in her journey. It acts like an invisible antagonist, creating feelings of self-doubt and insecurity within her. When Barbie leaves Barbie Land and enters the Real World, she experiences the harsh realities of patriarchy for the first time. She quickly realizes that the Real World is very different from her idealized Barbie Land.

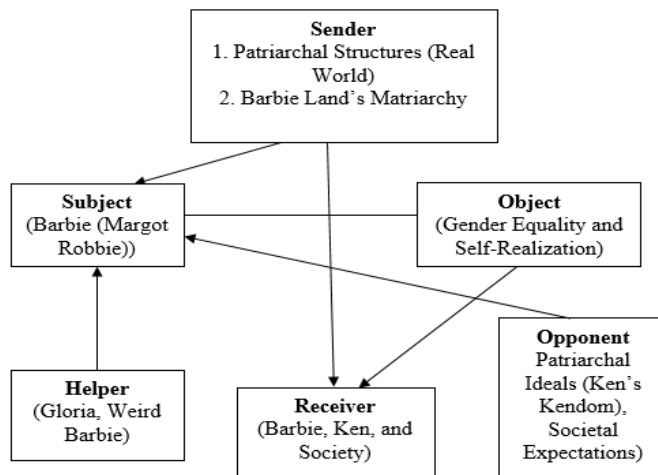


Diagram 2

Actantial Model of Gender Dynamics in *Barbie*

Description of the Actant's diagram 2: the **Subject** is Barbie (Margot Robbie). Barbie, as the "stereotypical Barbie," represents the perfect, idealized version of a woman. At first, she symbolizes the traditional and socially constructed idea of what a woman should be. As the story progresses, Barbie becomes the one who challenges these expectations. She takes on the role of changing the way gender norms are viewed, both in the perfect world of Barbie Land and in the real world. Furthermore, the **Object** is Gender Equality and Self-Realization. The main goal is to break down traditional gender roles and create a space where people can express their individuality and be treated equally, without being limited by outdated ideas about what men and women are supposed to be like. Then, the **Sender** of this actant is Patriarchal Structures in Real World and Barbie's Land. The patriarchal systems Barbie faces in the Real World show that traditional gender roles are deeply ingrained in society. Despite, Barbie Land seems like a perfect world where women are in charge, offering a kind of utopia for women's empowerment. The **Receiver** of this model is Barbie, Ken, and Society. Both Barbie and Ken face the weight of societal expectations and pressures placed on them. While Barbie works to redefine womanhood, Ken is on a journey to discover his own identity, free from the limitations of traditional male roles. Moreover, Gloria and Weird Barbie came out as the **Helper** of Barbie's journey. Gloria helps Barbie to see the challenges women face in a world full of contradictions. However, Weird Barbie acts as a mentor, guiding Barbie on her journey to break free from rigid societal expectations. Lastly, Patriarchal Ideals (Ken's Kendom) and Societal Expectations are the **Opponent** of this study. Ken's version of patriarchy shows how power systems built on rigid gender roles can harm society by creating inequality and disrupting balance. Besides, Society places heavy pressure on women to be "everything" at once perfect, successful, beautiful, kind, and more while men are pushed to fit into narrow ideas of masculinity, often encouraging toxic behaviors like dominance and emotional suppression.

a. Intrinsic Approach

1) Plot

a) Exposition

The film begins by introducing Barbieland, a utopian world where everything is ideal and gender roles are neatly defined.



Figure 1 Visual of Barbieland Scene in *Barbie* in minute 17:32 seconds.

Barbie is the embodiment of perfection and lives in a world where women rule and everything seems harmonious.

b) Rising Action

Barbie travels to the Real World, accompanied by Ken (Ryan Gosling). The contrast between Barbieland and the Real World becomes evident. While Barbieland is carefree and idealized, the real world presents Barbie with harsh realities of gender inequality and societal expectations.



Figure 2 Barbie's point of view of Real world in minutes 28:26

As Barbie navigates through the real world, she is confronted with the reality that women are treated differently, often marginalized and judged by external expectations.

c) Climax

The climax of the film occurs when Barbie reaches an epiphany about what it means to be a woman in the real world. She recognizes that the idealization of women in Barbieland has limited her ability to understand herself fully.

Barbie Margot

(nodding)

I want...I want to be part of the people that make meaning, not the thing that's made. I want to be the one imagining, not the idea itself. Does that make sense?

(Gerwig & Baumbach, n.d., p.112).

d) Falling Action

Barbie begins to actively reshape Barbieland's dynamics. She takes steps to dismantle the patriarchal system that has started to invade Barbieland, while also accepting that imperfection and personal agency are essential parts of her identity. As seen from the screenplay page 87 below:

Barbie Margot

By giving voice to the cognitive dissonance required to be a woman under the patriarchy, you robbed it of its power.

(Gerwig & Baumbach, n.d., p.112).

e) Resolution

Barbie finds resolution through self-empowerment. She learns to live without the need for perfection, realizing that true agency comes from understanding herself and rejecting restrictive norms.

We see details of Barbie Margot, her eye, her forearm, her pulse, her life. And she feels and sees what a human life is. The joy and pain of being mortal. All that she will lose and gain. Tears roll down Barbie Margot's face. She opens her eyes and says one thing:

Barbie Margot

YES.

(Gerwig & Baumbach, n.d., p.113)

2) Setting

The main settings in *Barbie* are Barbieland and the Real World. Each setting plays a key role in shaping the story and the characters' development

a. Barbieland

Barbieland is a perfect, idealized world where everything is designed to be flawless and everyone, especially the women, is in charge. It's a place of beauty, happiness, and perfection, but it's also a bit superficial and unrealistic.



Figure 3 Visual of Barbieland Scene in *Barbie* in minute 17:32 seconds

b. The Real World

The Real World is where Barbie travels after she starts facing an existential crisis in Barbieland. It is more complex and full of real-world challenges, like gender inequality, societal pressure, and the imperfections of human life.



Figure 4 Visual of Real World Scene in *Barbie* in minute 03:25 seconds

3) Character and Characterization

a. Barbie



Figure 5 Barbie’s Visual Described as Beautiful and Perfect in minute 04:28 seconds

Barbie is the central character, and her journey drives the plot. She starts as the perfect, idealized Barbie doll living in the flawless world of Barbieland, where everything seems perfect, and women are in charge. She represents the image of a woman society often expects beautiful, smart, and without flaws. Barbie is confident and happy but begins to experience an existential crisis. She starts questioning her role in Barbie Land and the perfection of her life.

b. Ken

Ken is Barbie’s love interest, though he is often seen as secondary to Barbie in Barbieland. He has a less significant role and is dependent on Barbie for validation. He does not have a clear purpose or identity of his own. Ken is drawn as secondary in Barbieland a matriarchy utopia.

Ken Ryan Gosling

Ken....is me?

Ken Ryan Gosling

Ken....is me!

(Gerwig & Baumbach, n.d., p.105)

c. Gloria (Human Mother)

A woman from the Real World, she plays a crucial role in the story by serving as a connection between Barbie and reality. She represents a regular woman who has to deal with the challenges of being a woman in a society that has unrealistic expectations.

Barbie Margot

I didn’t wish anything! I’ve never wanted anything to change.

Gloria

Well, honey, that’s life. It’s all change.

(Gerwig & Baumbach, n.d., p.76)

2. Wonder Woman (2017)

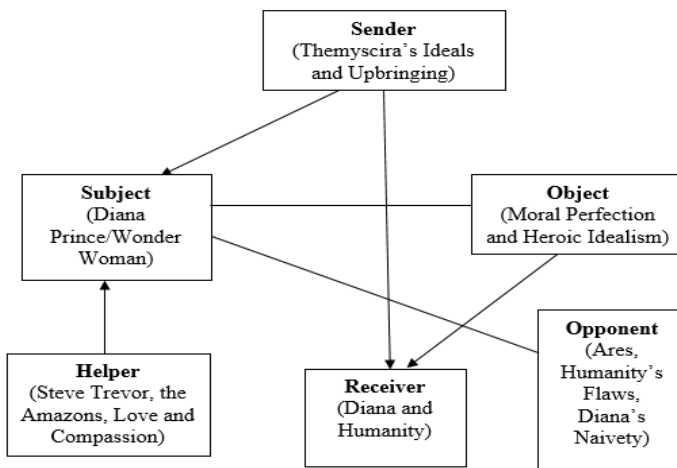


Diagram 3 Actantial Model of Perfectionism in *Wonder Woman*

Description of the Actant's diagram 3: Diana is the **Subject** of this actant's model. Diana aims to be the perfect hero, always strong, brave, and a symbol of hope for others. She dedicates herself to protecting people and standing for justice, trying to live up to the high ideals she believes in. Moral Perfection and Heroic Idealism as has shown in the diagram above become the **Object** of the study. Diana's goal is to achieve moral perfection by putting an end to war and human suffering. She believes that defeating Ares, the god of war, will bring peace to the world and solve the problems caused by conflict. Themyscira's Ideals and Upbringing is the **Sender**. Diana's upbringing on Themyscira teaches her that she is a perfect, divine warrior with a special destiny to save humanity. According to the Actant's diagram 3, Diana and Humanity become the **Receiver** of this study. The ultimate beneficiaries of Diana's pursuit of perfection are both herself and humanity. Through her journey, she learns more about who she truly is and gains a deeper understanding of herself. Moreover, the **Helper** based on the diagram above is Steve Trevor, the Amazons, Love and Compassion. In brief, Steve Trevor challenges Diana's simple view of good and evil, helping her see that the world is much more complicated than she first thought. The Amazons, the warrior women of Themyscira, train Diana to become a skilled fighter and give her important tools, like the Godkiller sword and the Lasso of Truth, to help her on her mission. Then, love and compassion are powerful internal motivators for Diana to reach her mission. Ares, Humanity's Flaws, Diana's Naivety are figured out as the **Opponent** in accordance with the diagram. Ares represents the chaos and corruption within humanity, making Diana question her belief that people are naturally good. Humanity's flaws like greed, violence, and selfishness stand in the way of Diana's goal to be morally perfect and heroic. Diana's naivety comes from her idealistic view of the world and her lack of experience.

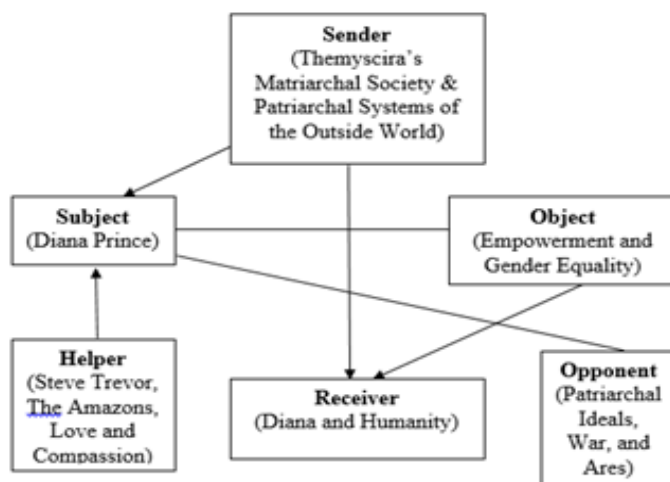


Diagram 4 Actantial Model of Gender Dynamics in *Wonder Woman*

Description of the Actant's diagram 4: Diana Prince or Wonder Woman is the **Subject** of this actant's model. Diana represents a strong and independent woman who breaks away from traditional female roles. She shows that women can be powerful, capable, and compassionate, all at the same time. Through the diagram above, the **Object** of this study is Empowerment and Gender Equality. Diana works to inspire and uplift humanity, striving to create a world where peace and justice can thrive. Themyscira's Matriarchal Society and Patriarchal System of the outside World become the **Sender** of this study. Diana grows up in Themyscira, an all-female society that celebrates strength, wisdom, and independence. When Diana leaves Themyscira and enters the Real World, she encounters patriarchal systems that enforce unequal gender roles. Furthermore, Diana and Humanity were the **Receiver** as it has seen in the diagram above. Both Diana and humanity play important roles in the story's exploration of gender dynamics. Diana learns to understand and navigate the complicated relationship between gender and power. The **Helper** of this study according to diagram

3 is Steve Trevor, The Amazons, Love and Compassion. Steve breaks away from traditional ideas of masculinity by being a supportive ally to Diana. While the Amazons play a crucial role in shaping Diana into who she is. In addition, Diana's deep compassion and ability to love are at the heart of her character. Patriarchal Ideals and War, and Ares are the **Opponent** of this study. The harmful systems of patriarchy and the destructive forces of war both contribute to gender inequality. However, Ares as the antagonist, represents the forces of war and chaos, embodying the systems of power that take advantage of both men and women.

a. Intrinsic Approach

1) Plot

a) Exposition

The film begins by introducing Diana's world on Themyscira, a peaceful and hidden island where the Amazons, a race of warrior women, live.

EXT. ARMY TRAINING GROUNDS (THEMYSCIRA) – DAY

Dozen or armored female warriors – amazons – engage in a dazzling array of training exercises. Every amazon is an ageless beauty, between 30 and 50. They spar with staves, knives, swords. Practice archery.

Spear. Throwing and lasso from horseback. It's breathtaking—

--and a young Diana, Princess of Themyscira watches it all from the edge of the field. Her eyes blazed in admiration.

(Heinberg et al., n.d., p.2)

Diana is the daughter of Queen Hippolyta, and she is curious and brave.

b) Complication

The story changes when Steve Trevor, a World War I pilot, crashes near Themyscira. Diana rescues him, and he explains that the world outside is in the middle of a terrible war (World War I).

c) Crisis

Diana and Steve, along with their team, infiltrate enemy lines to stop the Germans from using deadly chemical weapons created by Dr. Maru (Doctor Poison).

Diana

No, it can't be...everything I saw? They were killing each other. Killing people they can't even see... killing children. Like it was nothing...it had to be him! It can't be them!

Diana

My mother was right. She said "the world of men don't deserve you"

(beat)

That's why she left. They don't deserve our help...

(Heinberg et al., n.d., p.110, scene 101)

d) Climax

The true Ares reveals himself as Sir Patrick, a British official who has been secretly manipulating events. Ares tries to convince Diana that humanity is inherently corrupt and that she should join him in destroying them.

e) Resolution

With Ares defeated, the war finally ends. Diana learns that while the world is far from perfect, it is worth fighting for because of the love, hope, and goodness within people.

Diana (V.O.)

I used to want to save the world.

(Heinberg et al., n.d., p.135, scene 125)

Diana (V.O.)

To end war and bring peace to mankind.

(Heinberg et al., n.d., p.136, scene 126)

2) Setting

a) Themyscira (The Island of the Amazons)

Themyscira is a hidden, magical island where the Amazons live. It is a paradise with beautiful landscapes, lush greenery, clear waters, and majestic structures.

EXT. ARMY TRAINING GROUNDS (THEMYSCIRA) – DAY

Dozen or armored female warrior – amazons – engage in a dazzling array of training exercises. Every amazon is an ageless beauty, between 30 and 50. They spar with staves, knives, swords. Practice archery. Spear. Throwing and lasso from horseback. It's breathtaking—

(Heinberg et al., n.d., p.2, scene 4)

Themyscira represents Diana's childhood and innocence. It's a place of peace, harmony, and strength, untouched by the chaos of the outside world.

b) Early 20th Century London

When Diana leaves Themyscira, she arrives in London during World War I. The city is dark, polluted, and busy, filled with people who are focused on war efforts.



Figure 6 Diana's First Arrival in London in minutes 47:47

c) The No Man's Land

Much of the film takes place in the middle of World War I, with scenes set in the trenches, destroyed villages, and the battlefield. These settings are grim, dangerous, and filled with destruction and suffering.



Figure 7 the No Man's Land setting in the scene 1:14:07

3) Character and Characterization

a) Diana/Wonder Woman (Gal Gadot)

Diana, also known as Wonder Woman, is the main character and hero of the story. She is a princess of the Amazons, a race of warrior women living on the hidden island of Themyscira. Diana is brave, compassionate, and determined to fight for what is right.

--and a young Diana, Princess of Themyscira watches it all from the edge of the field. Her eyes blazed in admiration. (Heinberg et al., n.d., p.2, scene 4)

Diana

It's about what you believe...and I believe in love—

(Heinberg et al., n.d., p.133, scene 124D)

b) Steve Trevor

Steve is the second protagonist who helps Diana. He is a World War I pilot and spy who accidentally crashes on Themyscira. He becomes Diana's ally, friend, and love interest. Steve is brave, selfless, and deeply committed to stopping the war.



Figure 8 Visual of Steve Trevor in the scene 1:13:46

c) Sir Patrick/Ares

Ares is the God of War and the main antagonist of the film. He disguises himself as Sir Patrick, a British official, to manipulate events behind the scenes. Ares's characterization is portrayed as a cunning and manipulative villain who believes that humanity is inherently corrupt and destructive.

Sir Patrick/Ares (V.O)

All the suffering. All the pain and destruction they create. You would join me.
(Heinberg et al., n.d., p.117, scene 107 EG)

Discussions

Barbie, as the **subject**, is driven by the **sender**, which represents the societal expectations placed on women to meet unrealistic standards. These expectations include always looking flawless, excelling in every aspect of life, and never showing vulnerability. This pressure to uphold a “perfect” image forces Barbie to conform to an impossible standard, masking any imperfections or deeper emotions.

As the story progresses, cracks begin to appear in this perfect facade. Barbie starts experiencing unexpected flaws like flat feet and thoughts of death that lead her to question her identity and purpose. This existential crisis highlights the heavy burden of perfectionism and its emotional toll. Her journey reveals the **object** of the actantial model which is the need to find self-acceptance and break free from societal pressures to achieve true individuality and equality.

Barbie's struggles are supported by **helpers**, such as Gloria, a woman from the Real World, whose sincere monologue about the contradictions of being a woman helps Barbie understand the impossible standards placed on women. Additionally, **Weird Barbie** guides her on a path toward confronting imperfection and embracing her humanity. However, Barbie also faces opposition from **opponents**, such as the patriarchal ideals of the Real World and the societal pressures that uphold these unrealistic standards.

Barbie's journey exposes the harmful effects of perfectionism, showing that no one woman or even doll can live up to an unattainable ideal. By embracing her imperfections and rejecting societal expectations, Barbie paves the way for greater self-realization and the celebration of individuality. The intrinsic approach further reveals this struggle through the plot's structure and setting. The contrast between the idealized world of Barbie Land and the more complex, imperfect real world highlights the limitations of perfectionism. Barbie Land, a perfect matriarchy, represents the unattainable ideal, while the Real World reflects the harsh realities women face in a patriarchal society. As Barbie navigates this transition, the plot mirrors her internal struggle, showcasing her evolution from a symbol of perfection to a woman who embraces her flaws and seeks authenticity.

In *Wonder Woman* (2017), Diana Prince is portrayed as the embodiment of a perfect warrior, raised in the utopian and idyllic society of Themyscira. This all-female world shapes her into an ideal figure of strength, courage, and moral clarity, free from the complexities and imperfections of the outside world. However, the actantial model helps to understand that Diana's journey is not just about defeating external enemies but also about confronting the imperfections of humanity and her own ideals of perfection.

Barbie cleverly uses the contrasting worlds of Barbie Land and the Real World to examine and critique gender dynamics. On the surface, Barbie Land appears to be a utopia where women are in charge. It is presented as a successful matriarchy where all Barbies hold positions of power, from President to Supreme Court Justices, while Kens are secondary characters without significant influence or responsibilities. This setup flips traditional gender roles, creating an idealized society where women thrive without limitations imposed by patriarchy. However, when analyzed through the actantial model, it has shown that this seemingly perfect world is not without its flaws.

In the actantial model results in research outcomes show, Barbie serves as the **subject**, and her journey reveals deeper truths about gender dynamics. The **sender** in this context is society's expectations of women, which have been embodied in Barbie Land. The matriarchy of Barbie Land represents an idealized response to these expectations women are strong, successful, and free to do anything. Yet, this world enforces a new kind of pressure; the Barbies are expected to be perfect in every way. While the Kens are sidelined and treated as secondary, the Barbies are burdened with maintaining the illusion of a flawless society, highlighting how even in a matriarchal utopia, perfectionism creates its own challenges.

The **object** of Barbie's journey is to uncover and address the imbalance in both Barbie Land and the Real World, moving beyond simplistic ideas of perfection to embrace equality and individuality. This becomes clear when Barbie visits the Real World and realizes that it is the opposite of Barbie Land, a patriarchy where men hold most of the power and women face societal limitations and discrimination. Barbie's journey is shaped by **helpers** and **opponents** who influence her understanding of gender dynamics. Gloria, a woman from the Real World, serves as a key helper. Through her sincere monologue, Gloria expresses the exhausting contradictions of being a woman and society expects women to be strong but not too strong, confident but not arrogant, nurturing but not overly emotional. This insight helps Barbie realize that the perfectionism she represents in Barbie Land has placed similar pressures on women in the Real World. Other helpers include Weird Barbie, who guides Barbie in confronting imperfection, and Sasha, Gloria's daughter, who challenges Barbie's outdated ideals of feminism, pushing her toward a more inclusive and realistic understanding of empowerment. On the other hand, Barbie faces opposition from **opponents**, such as the patriarchal ideals of the Real World, which restrict women and perpetuate inequality. Another opponent emerges in the form of Ken, who, after experiencing male dominance in the Real World, brings patriarchal ideas back to Barbie Land, disrupting its matriarchal structure. While Ken initially appears as a lighthearted character, his rebellion reveals the dangers of systems built on exclusion and inequality, regardless of gender.

The intrinsic approach, through the film's plot, further highlights this struggle. Ken's attempt to introduce patriarchy to Barbie Land disrupts the existing balance, showcasing the detrimental effects of rigid power structures, regardless of which gender holds dominance. Barbie, as the subject, then embarks on a journey to challenge these dynamics, leading to a transformation of Barbie Land, embracing a more balanced and inclusive approach to gender roles.

In *Wonder Woman*, Diana, as the **subject**, is driven by the **sender**, which is her upbringing in Themyscira. This society instills in her a sense of responsibility to fight for justice and peace, based on her belief in the inherent goodness of humanity. She enters the Real World with the goal (**object**) of stopping Ares, the God of War, whom she sees as the source of humanity's violence and corruption. Her mission reflects her idealized belief that removing one force of evil will restore balance and bring peace to the world. However, Diana's journey is complicated by her encounter with **opponents**, particularly Ares and the harsh realities of human nature. Ares, as the antagonist,

challenges Diana's belief in perfection, revealing that humanity's flaws greed, violence, and hatred are not solely his doing but are part of human nature itself. This revelation forces Diana to confront the idea that the world is far more imperfect and complex than she had imagined.

Throughout her journey, Diana is supported by **helpers** like Steve Trevor, who acts as a moral and emotional ally. Steve's courage and sacrifice help Diana realize that while humanity is flawed, it is also capable of love, hope, and selflessness. Additionally, Diana's innate qualities, her compassion, strength, and determination serve as internal helpers, guiding her to look beyond her disillusionment and embrace the imperfections of the world. The **sender**, represented by the ideals of Themyscira and her belief in justice, collides with the reality of the war-torn world. This conflict drives Diana to re-evaluate her ideals and understand that perfection cannot exist in an imperfect world. Instead of seeking a flawless solution, she learns to accept humanity's duality, the coexistence of good and evil and chooses to fight for hope, love, and progress despite the flaws. In addition, the intrinsic approach, through the film's setting and plot, highlights that Diana's struggle is not just about defeating Ares, but also about coming to terms with the imperfections of both herself and the world.

Furthermore, Diana Prince, raised in the all-female, matriarchal society of Themyscira, brings a unique perspective to gender dynamics as she ventures into the Real World. Themyscira teaches her to value strength, independence, and justice, shaping her as a warrior and protector. However, her journey to the Real World exposes her to patriarchal systems that dominate society, forcing her to confront the inequalities and complexities of power dynamics. Diana is the **subject** in the actantial model, and her mission is to empower not just herself but also humanity. Her goal (**object**) is to bring peace to a world ravaged by war, guided by her belief that humanity's suffering is caused by Ares, the God of War. She initially views the conflict in simple terms, removing Ares will restore humanity's goodness and harmony. However, as she interacts with the Real World, she learns that the issue is far more complex, and human flaws such as greed, hatred, and violence cannot be blamed on one individual or force.

The **sender** driving Diana's mission is a combination of Themyscira's matriarchal ideals and the patriarchal world she discovers. Themyscira fosters Diana a sense of duty to protect the innocent and fight for justice, shaping her into an idealized hero. Though the Real World challenges her with the harsh realities of inequality, systemic oppression, and human imperfection. Diana faces significant **opponents** in her journey, both literal and symbolic. The primary antagonist, Ares, represents the destructive nature of war and the darker side of humanity. Besides a broader and more pervasive opponent is the patriarchal system she encounters in the Real World. This system devalues women, marginalizes their contributions, and perpetuates inequality. Diana's interactions with the men in power such as the dismissive politicians and military leaders highlight how deeply these systems are entrenched. Despite her strength and wisdom, she is often underestimated or dismissed simply because she is a woman.

At the same time, Diana is supported by **helpers** who aid her in her mission and provide emotional and moral support. Steve Trevor, her closest ally, plays a crucial role in helping Diana navigate the Real World. Unlike the men who dismiss or oppose her, Steve treats Diana as an equal and supports her mission, even when he does not fully understand her beliefs. His ultimate sacrifice reinforces the idea that humanity, despite its flaws, is capable of love, courage, and selflessness. Diana also draws strength from her own qualities; her compassion, determination, and unwavering belief in justice which act as internal **helpers** that guide her through moments of doubt. The intrinsic approach moreover, further reveals this through the plot's structure and the characters' journeys. Diana's journey from Themyscira to the real world mirrors her evolution from a sheltered princess to a powerful hero who embraces both masculine and feminine traits, challenging traditional stereotypes. Her relationship with Steve Trevor, who acts as her equal and ally, showcases a balanced dynamic where both partners support each other's agency and respect their individual strengths.

Conclusions

It becomes clear that both narratives intricately explore the themes of perfectionism and gender dynamics through their protagonists' journeys. The actantial model reveals how these characters navigate their worlds, facing societal expectations that dictate their identities and roles. In *Barbie*, the main character starts as an embodiment of societal ideals she is beautiful, successful, and seemingly perfect. However, as the story unfolds, Barbie confronts the harsh reality that these ideals are not only unattainable but also detrimental to her sense of self. The pressures of perfectionism weigh heavily on her, leading to an existential crisis that prompts her to question her purpose and identity. This journey is not just about rejecting the superficial standards imposed by society; it is about embracing her imperfections and discovering her true self. The actantial model highlights Barbie as the subject striving for self-realization, with societal expectations acting as the sender that shapes her journey. The helpers in her story, such as Gloria and Weird Barbie, guide her toward understanding that true worth lies in authenticity rather than perfection.

Similarly, *Wonder Woman* presents Diana Prince as a character who confronts with the ideals of heroism and moral perfection. Raised in the idyllic society of Themyscira, Diana is taught to be the perfect warrior, embodying strength and bravery. However, her journey into the real world exposes her to the complexities of humanity, where she learns that perfection is not a realistic goal. The actantial model illustrates Diana's struggle as she confronts the opponent of Ares, representing the chaos and flaws within humanity. Throughout her journey, Diana learns that true heroism is not about being flawless but about embracing her vulnerabilities and fighting for justice despite the imperfections of the world around her. The helpers in her narrative, including Steve Trevor and the Amazons, support her in understanding that strength can coexist with compassion, challenging traditional gender dynamics that often separate these traits.

Both films utilize the intrinsic approach to delve deeper into their narratives, focusing on the plot, setting, and characterization to convey their messages. In *Barbie*, the contrast between the idealized world of Barbie Land and the harsh realities of the real world serves to highlight the limitations of perfectionism. The setting itself becomes a character, reflecting the pressures women face in striving for an unattainable ideal. In *Wonder Woman*, the contrast of Themyscira and the war-torn world emphasizes the challenges women encounter in navigating patriarchal systems. The characters in both films are crafted to embody the struggles against societal expectations, with Barbie evolving from a stereotype into a complex individual who embraces her flaws, and Diana transforming from an idealistic warrior into a compassionate hero who understands the nuances of humanity.

In conclusion, both *Barbie* and *Wonder Woman* offer profound insights into the interplay of perfectionism and gender dynamics. Through the actantial model, it can be seen how societal expectations shape the journeys of these characters, while the intrinsic approach allows for a deeper understanding of the narratives' structures and themes. Ultimately, both films advocate for the importance of authenticity and self-acceptance, challenging the rigid standards imposed by society. They encourage viewers to embrace their imperfections and redefine their identities beyond the constraints of traditional gender roles, making a significant contribution to contemporary discussions on gender and empowerment.

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