

# BREAKING BARRIERS: SOCIETY'S INTERPRETATION OF THE CONCEPT OF EMPOWERED WOMEN IN THE BARBIE MOVIE

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## Abstract

This study aims to explore the meaning of the concept of empowered women in the Barbie movie through audience reception analysis using Ien Ang's theory. The Barbie movie was chosen as the research object because it represents the evolution of the feminist movement and features strong and independent female characters. The method used is informants reception analysis, where participants watch the movie and are interviewed to explore how they understand and interpret the scenes and characters in the movie. The results show that the empowered women depicted in the Barbie movie are defined as women who are resilient and have a deep understanding of their own potential, women who are equal to men, women who operate within group strength, and women who are overly dominant. This was derived from the in-depth interpretations of each informant, which were then categorized into good and bad criteria according to Ien Ang's analysis. Audiences who identified similarities between the movie's story and their personal experiences tended to feel more connected and validated in their understanding, which falls into the good criteria according to Ien Ang. Conversely, informants who experienced significant differences between their reality and the movie's story tended to feel less satisfied or even reject the conveyed message, placing them in the bad criteria.

Keywords: Empowered Women, Barbie Movie, Feminism, Reception, Active Audience

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Background

*It is literally impossible to be a woman.* (Quoted from Barbie's dialogue in the 2023 Barbie movie). Women must be beautiful, women must be able to cook, women must be able to take care of themselves, women are there to serve, women must be perfect, and there are many more expressions or narratives about the depiction of women in the real world regarding how they should act or behave. Gloria Steinem, a character featured in the Barbie movie, even gave a long speech about how women are judged and expected to be viewed by society.

Gender equality and women's empowerment are social goals that are increasingly gaining attention worldwide. Despite significant progress in addressing gender inequality, gender stereotypes in the media, particularly in movies, remain a relevant issue. Children's movies, including animated movies such as Disney, Barbie, and others, play an important role in shaping children's perceptions and views on gender roles. Gender stereotypes presented in such movies can affect children's understanding of roles that are considered typical for men and women. The movie industry, like Disney, interprets societal behavior and culture as ideas for its storylines, in which case the gender roles carried by Disney are based on social phenomena that occur within society.

One of the latest breakthroughs that has quite shaken society, especially women and certainly the movie industry, is the Barbie movie released in July 2023. This movie is the first live-action Barbie movie, whereas previously Barbie only appeared in animated form. The movie, directed by Greta Gerwig, has become a hot topic, especially among feminists, because Greta herself is known as someone who often comes up with interesting ideas related to feminism, as she did when she produced *Little Women* or *Lady Bird*. Since the beginning of her career, she has been involved in movies featuring complex and strong female characters. However, her most striking contribution is through her work as a director. Her debut movie, *Lady Bird* (2017), received critical acclaim and delved into a teenage girl's journey to find her identity (Aryawan, et al., 2021). Greta Gerwig has presented narratives that depict women's experiences honestly and empathetically, and her work has inspired and empowered women in the movie industry and her audience to celebrate the depth and complexity of women's experiences. Through her works, she has helped strengthen the message of feminism in the movie industry, including in her latest work, the Barbie movie.

This movie offers many interesting topics that can be discussed such as patriarchy, feminism, gender stereotypes, women's representation, and one of the most famous is empowered women, which is indirectly conveyed explicitly in Gloria Steinem's speech, one of the human characters in the Barbie movie who is a woman, mother, and Barbie lover. Gloria's speech breaks the stereotypes about women that have been society's daily intake, where Gloria herself wants to convey that women are not tools and that women have their own freedom to make life choices. Overall, this speech depicts the challenges, pressures, and injustices faced by women in society, and explores how the representation of women in pop culture can also reflect these uncertainties.

Indonesian society's understanding of the concept of empowered women has undergone significant development in recent years. Changes in society's views on empowered women reflect the ongoing social, cultural, and economic changes in Indonesia. Some factors influencing this understanding include: Education, where education plays an important role in enhancing the understanding of the concept of empowered women. More and more women have access to higher education and opportunities to develop their skills in various fields. This has helped create more empowered women who have a better understanding of their rights. Then there is women's participation in the workforce, where society is increasingly aware that women play an important role in the economy and development. Society also better understands that women have the potential to contribute significantly in various sectors.

A previous study by Husna & Yuhdi (2021) discussed the representation of empowered women on the Instagram account @RachelVennya, with this research focusing on the differences in the representation of empowered women between celebrity Instagram accounts and the 2023 Barbie movie. This study examines how the 2023 Barbie movie represents the concept of empowered women in the context of movie fiction and responds to it. This update provides a comprehensive perspective on how the concept of empowered women is understood and represented in Indonesian popular culture, considering the shift from social media to visual entertainment media.

Eryca Septiya's (2021) research on the Reception Analysis of Feminism in the movie *Birds of Prey* discusses the interpretation of selected informants regarding the concept of feminism in the movie using Stuart Hall's reception analysis method, which can be a reference for the author regarding audience reception research. In this case, the researcher uses audience reception of the Barbie movie but differentiates it in terms of the chosen analytical theory, where the researcher uses Ien Ang's audience reception. Cahya Haniva's study on women's discourse in the Disney Princess animated movie *Brave* is updated by comparing it with the 2023 Barbie movie, illustrating the change in female narratives from brave characters to characters with stronger roles and power in various contexts. This research helps understand the development of society's understanding of empowered women in the context of contemporary entertainment media.

## **1.2. Research Question**

The transformation in society's views on empowered women becomes relevant in the context of efforts to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment. However, to deeply understand how far this change has occurred and the extent to which the Barbie movie plays a role in shaping this understanding, contextual questions need to be formulated. Therefore, the research problem to be explained in this study is: How does the audience interpret the concept of empowered women in the Barbie movie? This research aims to understand how the concept of empowered women depicted in the Barbie movie is perceived by the audience. The Barbie movie, released in 2023, has sparked widespread public discussion regarding its themes of feminism and women's empowerment. Many view this movie as a representation of modern feminist narratives, where women are portrayed as having strength, independence, and the ability to change their world. This research stems from this public discourse, questioning to what extent and how this movie articulates the concept of empowered women and how the audience captures and interprets these messages.

## **1.3. Purpose and Objective**

Through a qualitative approach, this research will explore audience responses and interpretations of the themes of women's empowerment presented in the Barbie movie, in order to gain a deeper understanding of the impact and social reception of this representation. This research will focus on analyzing the society interpretation of the empowered women movement and the extent to which they view empowered women in the social environment based on their respective backgrounds and experiences.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. Interpretation**

The concept of meaning-making refers to the way individuals or groups interpret messages, symbols, or information they receive through various media and experiences (Multazam, 2021). In the context of this research, meaning-making encompasses how society understands and interprets the messages related to empowered women in the 2023 Barbie movie. Audience reception theory, as outlined by Ien Ang in her book *Watching Dallas* published in 1985, is a significant contribution to media studies, particularly in understanding the

active role of the audience in interpreting media messages. In that book, Ang conducted an in-depth study on how people responded to and interpreted the American television series *Dallas*.

In her research on *Watching Dallas*, Ien Ang asked the audience to describe their feelings when watching the soap opera. Ang also emphasized how *Dallas* could bring different kinds of enjoyment to its audience, noting that the pleasure derived from watching general TV shows was different from that of watching *Dallas* because enjoying *Dallas* was intertwined with a network of other activities, whereas watching TV was typically associated only with entertainment (Ang in Sokowati, 2023). Ang observed how *Dallas* was connected to realism and created two criteria based on this realism: Good Criteria; said to be good if the show was realistic, and Bad Criteria; if the show was not realistic (Ang in Sokowati, 2023). This led Ang to conclude that if the reality faced by the audience matched the fictional portrayal, the audience would become engrossed in each scene, blurring the boundaries between fiction and reality, making participation in the fictional world a source of pleasure (Ang, 1985).

Ien Ang's audience reception theory focuses on audience opinions, emphasizing the active role of audiences in conveying their opinions about media messages, rather than merely categorizing audience responses as Stuart Hall did. Ang highlighted that audience reception is not homogeneous but highly diverse. Factors such as personal experience influence how each individual understands and responds to media messages. This is what the researcher intends to do in her research—to observe the active reception of the Barbie movie audience, where the audience does not merely see the Barbie movie as entertainment but delves further into the other meaning-making activities derived from watching Barbie, similar to what Ang did in her research on the *Dallas* opera.

Through the qualitative approach used in this research, the researcher can collect data through in-depth interviews with Indonesian women from various backgrounds. By analyzing their responses and interpretations of media messages related to women's empowerment, this research can uncover how the concept of empowerment is formed in society and focus on direct meaning-making aligned with the satisfaction with the storyline, which the audience feels matches their reality based on their experiences and backgrounds.

## **2.2. Empowered Women**

The concept of empowered women refers to women who are active, independent, and have control over their lives and decisions. This includes aspects such as gender equality, economic empowerment, political participation, and the ability of women to reach their full potential. The concept of empowered women is related to the waves of feminism, which have now reached the third wave, allowing women to achieve their rights.

The 2023 Barbie movie reflects this concept by portraying the character of Barbie as an empowered and independent figure who challenges gender stereotypes and shows that women can achieve anything they desire. This is clearly demonstrated in a scene featuring Gloria Steinem, representing second-wave feminism, expressing her views on the position of women, delivered in a speech in the Barbie movie. This shows that the role of empowered women in society will continue to evolve with changing times, as reflected by second-wave

feminism, where the level of understanding of the concept of empowered women is successful when women have equal rights with men, especially in the workforce.

The relationship between audience reception by Ien Ang, which directs the audience to provide their interpretation of the 2023 Barbie movie regarding empowered women, through in-depth interviews conducted by the researcher, will be adjusted according to the background and personal experiences of each informant. This research will also be linked to the concept of empowered women that has occurred and is represented in the waves of the feminist movement, where the audience's interpretation of empowered women will be used as a measure of how well society can understand the context of women's empowerment that has occurred, particularly within society.

### **3. Research Methods**

A qualitative research approach is used in this study to delve into a deep understanding of the concept of the empowered women movement in the Barbie movie and how this understanding is influenced by social and cultural factors in the context of society. This research employs a descriptive type of study to describe and analyze the phenomena related to the public's understanding of empowered women in the Barbie movie. In this study, the descriptive type is used to illustrate how Indonesian society understands the concept of empowered women in the Barbie movie and how this understanding evolves with social and cultural changes.

The phenomenological research method is chosen to delve into the public's understanding of the concept of the empowered women movement in the Barbie movie. This approach will allow the researcher to explore the meanings contained in individual experiences in the context of understanding empowered women in the Barbie movie. Main data collection methods used in this research are based on interviews. These methods are chosen to obtain comprehensive and in-depth information about the public's understanding of empowered women in the 2023 Barbie movie.

- Interviews: In-depth interviews will be used as the primary method to collect data from informants who have watched the 2023 Barbie movie.

This study will be conducted by interviewing 6 informants with the following criteria for the interviews: (1) Indonesian women who are Gen Z, (2) Have watched the Barbie movie, (3) Have discussed or reviewed the Barbie movie on their social media, (4) Reside or are active in Jakarta.

The technique for determining informants used in this research is purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is a data source sampling technique with certain considerations (Sugiyono in Lenaini, 2021). These criteria are chosen considering the accuracy of the data results to be received in this research, where Gen Z represents new thoughts regarding social events occurring in Indonesia, particularly focusing on the understanding of empowered women. This study specifically requests the willingness of female informants to share their opinions about empowered women and to examine their experiences.

Meanwhile, this research uses the reception analysis method of Jankowski and Jensen (2002, pp. 139-140), which consists of three stages: (1) Data Collection, where data is obtained from the audience through in-depth interviews to understand their interpretation of the media text, as well as through observation of the behavior,



activities of informants, and references related to the research topic as supporting data; (2) Analysis, where data from in-depth interviews are interpreted to find the position of informants' interpretation based on Ien Ang's reception analysis; and (3) Interpretation of Reception Data, where the audience's interpretation of the media text is understood in the context of the media discourse in question and the broader social context, considering the informants' backgrounds, observational results, and documentation of informants.

In this study, Miles and Huberman's coding technique will also be used to analyze data from interviews based on the reception analysis technique of Jankowski and Jensen previously conducted by the researcher. This is used to help the researcher manage, analyze, and present data systematically. This technique consists of three main components: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing and verification. In the context of the reception analysis technique developed by Jankowski and Jensen, Miles and Huberman's coding technique can be applied to understand how the audience interprets the concept of empowered women in the 2023 Barbie movie. Jankowski and Jensen emphasize the importance of understanding how media messages are received and interpreted by the audience. By using Miles and Huberman's coding technique, the researcher can organize and analyze data from interviews regarding the audience's interpretation of empowered women in the movie. Data that has been reduced and systematically presented allows the researcher to identify themes and patterns in the audience's responses, revealing the social and cultural dynamics that influence their interpretations.

#### **4. Results and Discussions**

After analyzing the interview transcripts, which had previously been categorized into various themes, the results indicate that the concept of the empowered women movement in Indonesia has become a commonplace concern for Indonesian society, particularly among women themselves. In this context, the women represented in the study are Gen Z females residing or active in Jakarta. Their opinions are conveyed through the representation in the Barbie movie, which explores their understanding through various scenes and characters.

The study reveals that the informants' interpretation of the concept of empowered women in the Barbie movie can be divided into four categories: Resilient and Self-Aware, Achieving Equality, Group Strength, and Overly Dominant. This categorization is derived from the transcripts and coding conducted by the researcher, reflecting how the informants perceive the female characters in the Barbie movie in ways that align with their own life experiences.

These categories reflect various interpretations of scenes in the *Barbie* movie, where each category captures different dimensions of empowerment and societal dynamics. The potential abilities of Barbie are showcased through her roles in Barbieland, such as Doctor Barbie, President Barbie, and Police Barbie. For example, President Barbie delivers an inspiring speech about female leadership, demonstrating the idea that women are fully capable of holding significant positions of power. Similarly, Doctor Barbie is seen confidently addressing emergencies, representing women's capability to excel in technical and professional fields. The societal position of women is depicted as dominant and equitable in Barbieland, with all leadership roles held by women. This contrasts starkly with the real world that Barbie visits,

where men predominantly occupy positions of authority, as shown in the scene at Mattel’s corporate office, which is led entirely by male executives.

The influence of the environment and the people around Barbie is central to her journey. Barbieland’s supportive environment fosters growth and confidence for all its inhabitants. However, when Barbie enters the real world, she experiences challenges such as objectification and gender stereotypes. This is exemplified in the scene where Barbie feels discomfort while walking through a city, encountering catcalls and unwanted attention, highlighting the societal barriers women often face. Barbie’s role in the movie evolves from being an idealized figure of perfection to becoming a source of inspiration and a symbol of individuality. A pivotal moment occurs when Barbie, after losing her confidence, regains her sense of purpose by rallying other Barbies to reclaim Barbieland from the influence of patriarchy introduced by Ken. Additionally, her interaction with Ruth Handler, the creator of Barbie, emphasizes the importance of embracing imperfections and authenticity. These detailed depictions allow viewers to connect with the narrative and better understand how these categories manifest in the movie, grounding the analysis in specific scenes and character arcs.

● **Empowered Women as Strong Women Who Understand Their Potential**

Some informants describe the concept of empowered women in terms of how much a woman can gauge her own potential. This becomes a trigger or deeper meaning of how someone can achieve their goals. When someone is able to recognize their own potential, they can reach their aspirations. This depicts a strong woman, who, by understanding her potential, is able to fight for her future and dreams. For this interpretation, there are two informants who see empowered women as strong women who understand their potential: Informant 1 and Informant 2.

**Table 1. Empowered Women as Strong Women Who Understand Their Potential**

<b>Informant</b>	<b>Statement</b>	<b>Interpretation</b>
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● I see here that empowered women are those who are resilient and full of creative ideas to solve existing problems (I1).</li> <li>● Barbie is portrayed as a character who has freedom, confidence, the ability to overcome various challenges, independence, and creativity in solving problems, finding solutions effectively. Meanwhile, Gloria is shown as someone who can express the feelings experienced by many women but are often left unspoken due to societal pressures and expectations (I1).</li> <li>● After watching the <i>Barbie</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● In this statement, Informant 1 emphasizes that empowered women are strong individuals who can face various challenges. Moreover, they are also rich in creative ideas to tackle issues. The meaning of this statement is that resilience and creativity are the main characteristics of empowered women, demonstrating their ability to adapt and find solutions in different situations.</li> <li>● In the second statement, Informant 1 connects Barbie’s character with the concept of empowered women. Barbie is depicted as a figure who is free, confident, independent, and creative in overcoming challenges. Additionally, Gloria’s character is</li> </ul>

	<p>movie, I feel that my perspective has been reinforced, showing that women don't need to conform to beauty standards. Women should be strong in every way and capable of doing anything (I1).</p>	<p>highlighted as someone who can voice the emotions of countless women who are often silenced by societal norms and demands. The meaning of this statement is that empowered women are not only those who can independently face challenges but also those who can express and articulate themselves despite social pressures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● In the final statement, Informant 1 expresses that after watching <i>Barbie</i>, their view of women has been strengthened—that women don't need to adhere to specific beauty standards. Instead, women should be resilient in all aspects and versatile in every way. The meaning of this statement is that empowered women are not defined by physical appearance but by their strength, capabilities, and adaptability in various aspects of life.</li> </ul>
<p>2</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● In Barbie Land, women are portrayed as individuals with various professions, which means they are capable of doing anything they set their minds to for their lives (I2).</li> <li>● Barbie represents women who can fight for themselves to become anything they want. They can pursue any profession, but they still hold firm principles and maintain confidence (I2).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● In this statement, Informant 2 emphasizes that the women in Barbie Land are depicted as having diverse careers, showcasing their ability to pursue anything in life. The meaning of this statement is that empowered women possess the flexibility and skills that enable them to take on various career paths and manage their lives independently and competently.</li> <li>● The second statement portrays Barbie as a symbol of women who are capable of striving for themselves and achieving whatever they desire, including excelling in diverse professions. However, what stands out is their ability to uphold strong principles and self-confidence. The meaning of this statement is that empowered women are not only focused on career achievements and success but also maintain integrity and confidence in every step they take.</li> </ul>

Source: Based on Informant (Refers to Ien Ang, Watching Dallas, 2013)

Both Informants 1 and 2 share the view that empowered women are those who are strong and understand their potential. They agree that awareness of one's strength and potential is the foundation for other abilities. Informant 1 emphasizes



that empowered women are not only strong in facing challenges but also creative in finding solutions. Strength and understanding of one's potential enable them to solve various problems with innovative ideas. On the other hand, Informant 2 underscores the importance of firm principles and self-confidence as traits of empowered women. According to them, awareness of one's potential allows women to pursue and succeed in various professions while maintaining their integrity and convictions. Despite their different focuses, both Informants 1 and 2 agree that strength and understanding of one's potential are the foundations for other abilities such as creativity, independence, and strong principles.

● **Empowered Women as Equals to Men**

Empowered women are those who have equality in various aspects of life, including work and education. In this research, some informants conveyed that empowered women are those who have the same opportunities as men in any field, especially in work and education. Another interpretation of empowered women is reflected in the social context, where many informants see empowered women as those who experience equality between women and men. Women aspire to have the same rights as men. For this interpretation, there are two informants who view empowered women as equals to men: Informant 3 and Informant 4.

**Table 2. Empowered Women as Equals to Men**

Informant	Statement	Interpretation
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The <i>Barbie</i> movie successfully conveys this idea. As I mentioned, by the end of the story, Barbie demonstrates it—where men and women live alongside each other in harmony, with no one being dominant (I3).</li> <li>● It also illustrates that women in real life can work in any field regardless of gender (I3).</li> <li>● Barbie demonstrates this concept, where men and women live side by side in harmony, with equal roles and no dominance from either side (I3).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● In the first statement, Informant 3 emphasizes that the <i>Barbie</i> movie successfully portrays gender equality, where men and women coexist without one dominating the other. The meaning of this statement is that empowered women are those who live in equality with men, without any party exerting dominance.</li> <li>● Informant 3 states that the <i>Barbie</i> movie inspires women in the real world to pursue any career without being limited by gender. The meaning of this statement is that empowered women have the freedom to choose their careers and roles in society without being restricted by gender stereotypes.</li> <li>● This statement reaffirms the concept of equality presented in the <i>Barbie</i> movie, where men and women coexist with equal roles. The meaning of this statement is that empowered women participate in life on equal terms with men, without domination</li> </ul>

		from either side.
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Empowered women are those who can demonstrate that any profession is not exclusively for men, and this is clearly depicted in the <i>Barbie</i> movie (14).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>From this statement, it can be concluded that, according to Informant 4, empowered women are individuals who embody equality with men by taking on various professions without gender limitations. This gender equality is reflected in the freedom and ability of women to choose and pursue the careers they desire. The <i>Barbie</i> movie illustrates this concept effectively, inspiring women to see themselves as equals to men in terms of opportunities and roles in society. Empowered women, therefore, are those who prove that any profession can be pursued by women, reinforcing the concept of gender equality in all aspects of life.</li> </ul>

Source: Based on Informant (Refers to Ien Ang, Watching Dallas, 2013)

Informants 3 and 4 share the view that empowered women are those who are equal to men, but they highlight different aspects of this equality. Informant 3 emphasizes that empowered women are those who live alongside men without domination, both in daily life and in societal roles. This equality is depicted in a harmonious and balanced life between men and women, where no side is more dominant. On the other hand, Informant 4 highlights women's ability to fill various professions that are typically dominated by men. According to them, empowered women are those who can prove that there are no gender limitations in the workplace and professions, showing that women can pursue careers in any field they desire. Although their focuses differ, both agree that empowered women are those who have the same rights and opportunities as men in various aspects of life.

● **Empowered Women as Group Strength**

Empowered women are an undeniable group force. When women support each other, they create an environment that allows every individual to grow and thrive. The concept of "woman support woman" is central to this movement, where solidarity and collaboration among women result in significant positive change. By working together, women not only empower themselves but also their communities, creating good and sustainable outcomes. Through this collective strength, empowered women demonstrate that together they can face challenges and achieve greater success. For this interpretation, there are three informants who view empowered women as group strength: Informants 1, 5, and 6.

**Table 3. Empowered Women as Group Strength**

Informant	Statement	Interpretation
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>From the <i>Barbie</i> movie, it shows female characters supporting one another and working together to achieve their goals. So, I see the values of solidarity as part of the concept of empowered women in the <i>Barbie</i> movie (I1).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>From this statement, it can be concluded that, according to Informant 1, empowered women are not only individually strong but also possess great power when they unite and support one another. Solidarity and collaboration among women are at the core of this concept, where mutual support enables them to achieve shared goals. The <i>Barbie</i> movie is seen as successfully portraying these values, demonstrating that group strength is a vital element in building and reinforcing empowered women.</li> </ul>
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This is what characterizes empowered women—they become aware, help others become aware, build strength together, and ultimately speak up. They reflect on their experiences, support one another, and find the courage to speak out. This behavior demonstrates a culturally conscious mindset, as they recognize their abilities and strengths and have the bravery to critique the existing situation (I5).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Informant 5 emphasizes that empowered women raise awareness and strengthen each other, ultimately giving them the courage to speak out and challenge the status quo. The meaning of this statement is that collective awareness and mutual support among women are at the core of their strength, enabling them to overcome social barriers and advocate for change.</li> </ul>
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The scene I liked the most was when they came together, uniting their thoughts and opinions to prove their ability to challenge the strategies of patriarchy (I6).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Informant 6 highlights that their favorite scene was when the women in the movie joined forces, combining their ideas and perspectives to demonstrate their capacity to resist patriarchal strategies. The meaning of this statement is that empowered women can build strength through collaboration and solidarity, leveraging their collective intelligence to confront and overcome the obstacles they face.</li> </ul>

Source: Based on Informant (Refers to Ien Ang, Watching Dallas, 2013)

Informants 1, 5, and 6 all view empowered women as group strength, but they highlight different aspects of this concept. Informant 1 emphasizes solidarity and support among women in achieving common goals. According to them, these values of solidarity are an integral part of the concept of empowered women, where women support and collaborate to overcome challenges. Informant 5, on the other hand, underscores the importance of collective awareness and the courage to speak out against social issues. They highlight how women with similar problems recognize each other and advocate for change together, showcasing their collective strength. Meanwhile, Informant 6 focuses on collaboration and discussion as a way to empower each other. They appreciate the process of unifying thoughts and opinions to find joint solutions to challenges, showing that group strength emerges through cooperation and dialogue. Although their focuses differ from solidarity, collective awareness, to collaboration, all agree that empowered women are those who build strength through support and cooperation in a group.

● **Empowered Women as Too Dominant**

Empowered women are symbols of equality and progress, but excessive dominance can also create new challenges. When a woman or a group of women becomes so empowered that they dominate, it leads to imbalance. Informant 4 views empowered women as overly dominant, depicting their strength and capability as excessive to the point of dominance. This statement highlights the perspective that the power and ability of empowered women can make them seem to dominate their surroundings. Informant 4 emphasizes that female dominance starts from being an empowered woman, who then becomes so strong and capable that she eventually dominates. The meaning of this statement is that the abilities and advantages of empowered women can make them appear overly dominant, as they excel in and control various fields. Informant 4 assesses the character of Barbie in the movie as a representation of extreme feminism, where the characters seek to dominate the world. The implication is that the power and capability displayed by women in the movie are seen as excessive, making it seem as if they want to dominate the entire world, rather than just seeking equality.

**Table 4. Empowered Women as Too Dominant**

Informant	Statement	Interpretation
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● It actually starts with empowered women. It starts with empowered women, and eventually, they can dominate, precisely because we feel women are empowered, women are capable (I4).</li> <li>● Barbie is very much</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Informant 4 emphasizes that the domination of women begins with them being empowered, which then makes them so strong and capable that they eventually dominate. The meaning of this statement is that the abilities and strengths of empowered women can make them appear overly dominant, as they are capable of excelling and mastering various fields very well.</li> <li>● Informant 4 views Barbie’s character in</li> </ul>

	<p>about feminism. The characters are too extreme, they want to dominate the world (I4).</p>	<p>the movie as a representation of extreme feminism, where the characters aim to dominate the world. The meaning of this statement is that the strength and capabilities displayed by the women in the movie are seen as excessive, making it seem like they want to dominate the entire world, rather than merely seeking equality.</p>
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Source: Based on Informant (Refers to Ien Ang, Watching Dallas, 2013)

The active role of informants and their opportunity to freely express their experiences and interpretations of the concept of empowered women and the general portrayal in the Barbie movie make Ien Ang's theory suitable for this research. The researcher does not restrict informants from providing their interpretations, which allows them to freely express their opinions. This enables the researcher to gauge the extent of satisfaction and enjoyment experienced by informants while watching the Barbie movie, categorizing their responses into Good Criteria and Bad Criteria based on their level of satisfaction and enjoyment.

- **Good Criteria in the Portrayal of Empowered Women in the Barbie movie**

The Good Criteria in this research are based on how informants feel satisfied with the scenes and characters depicted in the Barbie movie, where this satisfaction and enjoyment are derived from how closely the portrayal in the movie reflects the informants' lives. In this case, the researcher observes that all informants fall within the context of Good Criteria, even though their interpretations vary. The interpretations that fall under the Good Criteria, according to the researcher, are represented in three of the four findings, namely: Empowered Women as Strong Women Who Understand Their Potential, Empowered Women as Equals to Men, and Empowered Women as Group Strength.

The researcher concludes this because the responses given by informants lead to positive outcomes (enjoyment in watching) when discussing the interpretations in these three findings, which contrasts with the responses regarding the fourth finding: Empowered Women as Too Dominant.

**Table 5. Good Criteria**

Informant	Result 1	Result 2	Result 3
1	v		v
2	v		
3		v	

4		v	
5			v
6			v

Source: Based on Informant (Refers to Ien Ang, Watching Dallas, 2013)

It can be seen from the table provided that each informant offers different interpretations of the empowered women portrayed in the Barbie movie, even though the criteria chosen by the researcher are based on Indonesian women with similar residency and age ranges. The findings also show that one informant may provide interpretations for two findings simultaneously, although on average, informants interpret empowered women in only one context. This relates to the informants' life experiences, as people's experiences with an object can vary because such experiences are subjective and influenced by the content of their memory. A person's perspective on an object is based on experiences related to similar objects (Perwita, et al., 2022).

- **Bad Criteria in the Portrayal of Empowered Women in the Barbie movie**

For the Bad Criteria applicable to the Barbie movie, it refers to the fourth finding, which is that empowered women are those who are too dominant. This is interpreted by the only informant, Informant 4, who feels that the portrayal of women in the Barbie movie presents an image of women who are overly empowered. According to Informant 4, Barbie is depicted as excessively feminist, and it is through this excessive feminism that the concept of overly empowered women emerges.

**Table 6. Bad Criteria**

<b>Informant</b>	<b>Result 4</b>
1	
2	
3	
4	v
5	
6	

Source: Based on Informant (Refers to Ien Ang, Watching Dallas, 2013)



The researcher found that Finding 4 falls under the Bad Criteria because when Informant 4 described their reasons, they referred to negative statements or disagreements with the scenes and characters depicted. The scene that illustrates this right is when Barbie takes control of Barbie Land and doesn't allow the Kens to take leadership positions. All leadership tasks are carried out by the Barbies.

According to Informant 4, the viewing experience of the movie was not sufficiently satisfying or enjoyable due to the scenes that highlight empowered women as overly dominant, which did not align with Informant 4's own experiences. Informant 4 mentioned that they often participate in organizations and activities consisting of women, but in those activities, women take roles without dominating.

Informant 4 believes that such a concept represents empowered women, where women should also provide space for men to express themselves. This contrasts with the Barbie movie, where Informant 4 felt that the character of Barbie was depicted as overly dominant and seeking to control everything on her own.

- **Factors Leading to Good and Bad Criteria**

The Good and Bad Criteria resulting from this research are determined by the various backgrounds and experiences of each informant. From the research results, the researcher identified three main factors that influence informants' satisfaction when watching the Barbie movie, which determines whether informants fall into the Good or Bad Criteria.

- **Factors of Interpretation Based on Experience**

According to Ien Ang's categorization of viewers, life experiences play a primary role in how viewers feel satisfaction when seeing scenes in the movie compared to their own life experiences. It is evident that all informants provided their interpretations of the portrayal of empowered women in the Barbie movie, and all informants fall into the Good Criteria. This shows a similarity between the characters or scenes in the movie and the informants' lives. Informants 1 and 2, who are students studying away from their hometowns, fall into the Good Criteria, particularly in Finding 1, which discusses women who can express themselves and focus on their potential. This suggests that both informants reflect their freedom and decisions in pursuing education, as depicted in the Barbie movie, leading them to feel a sense of shared fate with the character Barbie and other women in the movie, thus placing them in the Good Criteria based on their experiences.

On the other hand, Informants 3 and 4, based on the findings, are in the Good Criteria but in different categories, namely equality. Informants 3 and 4 share similar experiences where, in their daily lives, they are in supportive friendship circles without one person dominating. Informant 4 described how their environment provides equal opportunities for both women and men, leading them to feel that empowered women are those who are equal and do not dominate. This is why Informant 4 falls into both Good and Bad Criteria, as they find some scenes aligning with their concept of equal opportunity for women but also feel that some scenes depict excessive dominance by women, which does not match their understanding of empowerment.

Informants 5 and 6, and interestingly, Informant 1 rejoined to provide an interpretation agreeing with Finding 3, which portrays empowered women as

group strength. This is related to their experiences. Informant 5, working at the National Commission on Violence Against Women, often relies on and works within group strength, which informs their interpretation of empowered women as group strength. Similarly, Informant 6 frequently discusses women's issues on social media and receives warm responses and feedback from followers, especially other women, which they interpret as empowered women arising from group strength. Informant 1 also aligns with this finding, as they find similarities between the movie's scenes and characters and their own life, where they frequently interact in all-female groups. Thus, experiences influence why each informant falls into different findings and criteria, based on their respective life experiences.

○ **Factors of Interpretation Based on Education**

Regarding education, all informants are individuals who are currently pursuing or have completed undergraduate education, which allows them to provide clear statements on how they interpret the portrayal of empowered women in the Barbie movie. Education is a significant factor here because one of the influences on human thought patterns is the wealth of knowledge and information. This wealth of information is acquired through both formal and informal education. In this case, informants with higher education levels have broader knowledge and diverse and insightful thought patterns.

○ **Factors of Interpretation Based on Culture & Ethnicity**

The informants in this study come from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds, although the majority are from the Javanese ethnic group, with 2 out of 6 informants having Javanese heritage, namely Informants 1 and 6. In terms of Javanese culture, the statements provided by these two informants did not significantly influence their interpretations. Similarly, Informant 6, who is from Bandung, did not find cultural differences affecting their interpretation. However, Informant 3, who is from the Batak ethnic group, noted that patriarchal culture is still prevalent among the Batak. Informant 3 observed similarities between the Barbie movie's depiction of patriarchy, particularly in a scene involving Ken, but did not focus on this aspect extensively. Although they acknowledge that Batak culture is still dominated by patriarchy, they view it from a progressive perspective, as their family's Batak culture reflects gender equality and freedom from gender-based restrictions. This demonstrates that while culture is a factor in audience interpretation, other factors such as education and experience also influence interpretations. Informant 3, despite recognizing patriarchal culture in Batak, did not feel its impact significantly due to their family's progressive stance on gender equality.

As a result of this study, the portrayal of empowered women in the Barbie movie generally leaves a positive impression on the informants. All informants actively participated in providing their interpretations of empowered women as strong individuals who understand their potential, women who are equal to men, and women who work within groups. In this context, empowered women as a force within a group yielded the most fitting results, with 3 informants interpreting empowered women as those who work within a group and create change by uniting their strengths. For the other findings, each is represented by only one informant's interpretation. Interestingly, Informant 4, who is the only informant expressing dissatisfaction with the movie, thus falling into the Bad Criteria, views

empowered women as overly dominant. Despite this, Informant 4 also sees the movie's depiction of women being able to pursue any profession they want as aligning with their view of empowerment as equality with men in the context of employment. This corresponds to Finding 2, where empowered women are seen as equal to men.

This proves that in Ien Ang's reception analysis, audiences can occupy multiple interpretive positions simultaneously and even fall into different criteria based on how their life experiences shape their thinking and interpretation. Audiences are free to interpret scenes and characters in a movie as broadly as they wish, determining the Good and Bad Criteria.

## 5. Conclusions and Recommendations

Through this analysis, it can be concluded that the Barbie movie has successfully created a dialogue between the media and the audience regarding the concept of empowered women. There are four categories interpreted by the audience regarding empowered women as reflected in the Barbie movie: The three findings—empowered women as strong individuals who understand their potential, empowered women as equal to men, and empowered women as a group force—are depicted through various elements in the *Barbie* movie. Empowered women as strong individuals are illustrated in scenes where Barbie embraces her independence and confidence, particularly when she takes action on her own to address the issues in Barbie Land. Her costumes, reflecting leadership and autonomy, emphasize her self-reliance. The idea of women as equal to men is portrayed in scenes where Barbie and the other women hold leadership positions, while the men, like Ken, play secondary roles. This equality is reinforced by the women's actions and in their attire, which blends professionalism and authority, symbolizing their equal standing with men. Lastly, the concept of empowered women as a group force is clearly demonstrated when the Barbies unite to challenge patriarchy and support each other. Their collective strength is visualized through coordinated costumes and collaborative actions, highlighting solidarity and the power of women coming together for a common cause. These elements combined convey that the empowerment of women is not just about individual strength, but also about equality and collective support.

This portrayal can be classified under the Good Criteria, as the interpretations from the informants as the audience lead to positive outcomes, indicating that the informants are satisfied and pleased with the portrayal of empowered women in the *Barbie* movie. However, the Bad Criteria also appear in this movie, identified by one informant who felt that the portrayal of empowered women in Barbie showed women as excessively dominant, creating a negative and unpleasant impression for that informant. Despite this, the informant could still find positive characteristics in the portrayal of empowered women in the *Barbie* movie, thus placing them in the Good Criteria as well, according to Ien Ang's typology.

Moreover, breaking barriers is a theme that resonates strongly with the informants' experiences of overcoming various obstacles in their lives, cultural, educational, or social. These informants have faced significant challenges such as gender stereotypes, discrimination, and rigid societal expectations, but they have managed to overcome these through their experiences and struggles. They perceive that the 2023 Barbie movie successfully depicts similar struggles through its strong characters and inspiring scenes. The movie illustrates how female characters not only overcome obstacles but also shape their identities and successes in an empowering way. The story in the movie mirrors the

informants' reality, where the courage to break through limitations and collaborate with other women is key to overcoming barriers, thereby creating greater opportunities and equality.

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