# BARBIE IS NOT BORN, BARBIE IS MADE: FEMININITIES DERIVED THROUGH POSTMODERN CONSUMPTION*

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## Abstract

After the release of the Barbie movie simultaneously worldwide in 2023, the Barbie brand and consequently the "ideal" of femininity associated with Barbie became widespread globally and in Turkey, particularly through social media platforms, fostering a postmodern consumer culture. This study conducts a descriptive analysis of Barbie-themed posts made by female users on Instagram which is one of the significant social media platforms, to examine the femininities or discourses of femininity derived through Barbie consumer culture.

It is argued that the new generation Barbie character, defined within a postfeminist and neoliberal discourse, becomes a part of our reality as a simulacrum performed by real women. Thus, a postmodern femininity identity in which the boundaries of reality are blurred is shown to society with every Barbie post while local or various excluded femininities can both make themselves visible and exist through this simulacrum, on the condition of being like Barbie. Instagram has become a kind of "spectacle" where all kinds of consumption are exhibited, as postmodernist thinkers imagine. It is analyzed that individuals both relate themselves to a hyperreal female identity and also emphasize their subjectivities by referencing to their different or excluded femininities.

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## 1. Introduction

In this study, a descriptive analysis of Barbie-themed posts made by female users on Instagram after the Barbie movie, which was released simultaneously all over the world in 2023, will be conducted to examine the femininities or femininity discourses derived through Barbie consumption culture. A postmodern consumption culture through the Barbie brand and thus the "ideal" of Barbie femininity is spreading all over the world and in our country, especially through posts on social media platforms. In different Instagram accounts both in our country and around the world, Barbie posts that are both similar to each other and differentiated from each other due to local and individual differences draw attention. In this respect, there is a wide range of Barbie posts: In addition to veiled women who make Barbie-like posts with hijab or headscarf, women who emphasize their motherhood, women who emphasize their sexual identity by wearing pink mini dresses or various pink forms, mothers or brands emphasizing that their daughters dressed in pink children or baby dresses are Barbies, and even various brands that produce pink Barbie items can be listed in this list. In this respect, after the Barbie movie, a consumption culture that has become viral through dressing and being like Barbie attracts attention all over the world.

This study will show that a discourse of femininity that all women or girls can carry and adopt the Barbie identity by sharing Barbie-like consumption and social media posts is circulating in the social sphere starting from social media. It is seen that the postfeminist discourse, which supports all kinds of individual choices of women and emphasizes that women can become whatever they want, is frequently repeated in the posts as a discourse that facilitates the adoption and spread of consumer culture by women. In all of the posts, it is seen that the Barbie brand or "ideal" is adapted in accordance with the individual preferences and cultural characteristics of different women, thus facilitating both the reaffirmation of domestic femininities through Barbie and the spread of Barbie-themed consumption. Through the consumption culture shaped around a discourse of femininity envisioned by postfeminism, women succeed in becoming Barbie "even if only by holding on to one end", while the Barbie brand or ideal continues to hybridize and spread with different imaginaries of femininity all over the world. While the meaning of being Barbie expands and transforms with local discourses of femininity, local and individual femininities can also be articulated into a global culture around Barbie. According to the postfeminist discourse of femininity

presented through all these posts, it is emphasized that although not everyone has an "ideal" body and lifestyle like Barbie, they can be Barbie by consuming Barbie-themed products and sharing Barbie-themed posts with a pink tiny dress, a pink headscarf, long blonde hair or a blonde hair-like headscarf or a pink "local or ethnic dress" that they will choose in accordance with their individual preferences.

## 2. Postmodernism and Consumption Culture

According to postmodern theory, the cultural counterpart of consumer culture or international capitalism is the concept of postmodernism. According to this understanding, the postmodernist cultural production process eliminates the traditional boundaries between high culture and commercial culture or popular culture. In postmodernism, people's ability to think in a traditional perspective gradually diminishes and people suffer from memory loss as they become isolated from the past. People learn about history not through the projects of political movements or ideologies, but through televised panel discussions. Culture is also commodified as consumption is processed in cultural terms. Works of art are subject to market forces and commodities are advertised as works of art. In this context, postmodernism emphasizes changes in the process of cultural production and refers to a period in which it is shaped by mutual commercial influences. With consumer capitalism, the rise of the popular age and non-cultural commodification come to the fore. In this case, works of art and other cultural products become widespread through harmful commercialization and the marketing of advertising (Cevizci, 2000: 761). While postmodernism is characterized as the cultural characteristics of consumer capitalism, it focuses on changes in the process of cultural production. Culture is shaped under the influence of popular transition and works of art and other cultural products are considered as commercial commodities.

Today, new means of consumption encourage consumers to buy more than they need. It can be said to exploit people by encouraging them to pay more and spend more than they need. The intertwining of past, present and future earnings allow people to spend their future earnings in the present. This has contributed to the growth and spread of the consumer society (Ritzer, 2016: 210). An important part of the lives of individuals living in society is now shaped within the framework of consumption. Shopping malls have become the defining feature of the age and have replaced factories. In this context, according to Ritzer (2016: 228-229), many public spaces are now considered as places where all kinds of consumption can take place. He considers that a social environment is ready for frantic consumption at every moment of life and everywhere and states that:

*"More and more we think of places as places to consume. For example, we tend to think of universities, hospitals, churches and museums in this way. We see ourselves consuming them and in the power to consume the things in them. What's more, when we think of them, we think of the shiniest new model of means of consumption. We expect such places to look and function like shopping malls, for example."*

Bocock (1997: 58), who states that modern consumers are physically passive but mentally active, emphasizes that consumers are distanced from feelings of autonomy and creativity during many activities due to constantly packaged goods and services. For example, activities such as playing sports, home decoration and cooking are activities that require participation. However, these activities have not been able to free themselves from the influence of commercial interest groups on the consumption sector since the 1950s. Therefore, today's capitalism forces people to buy new products and spend their lives with commodities in order to maintain competition and increase profits. According to Bocock (1997: 57), the culture of consumption has hegemonized modern capitalism. This ideology of consumption serves both to legitimize capitalism and to motivate people to become consumers in reality as well as in their virtual worlds.

Jean Baudrillard sees consumption as a form specific to industrial society. *"Naturally excluding the definition of it as a process of satisfying needs that everyone knows."* According to him, it is not correct to see consumption as a passive form of submission and purchase, comparing it to the active process of production, and from this to construct simple schemes of behavior (and alienation). From the outset, Baudrillard sees consumption *"as a form of active relationship (not only with objects but also with society and the world) on which our entire cultural system rests, a systematized world of activities and a way of responding to all problems"* (Baudrillard, 2011: 240). The most important difference that distinguishes Baudrillard from other theorists working on consumer culture is that he draws attention to the symbolic dimension of consumption. According to Baudrillard, in today's consumer society, symbols, signs, brands (indicators) are consumed. He emphasizes that brand value is added to the value of products after their use value. Baudrillard expresses this situation as follows (Baudrillard, 1998: 64):

*"Exchange value is a surrogate of use value. Objects (simulacra) move away from their original state when they acquire exchange value.*

> [1]*However, the symbolic (indicative) value of a good, the brand value, is even more abstract than the exchange value and is considered as the simulacra of simulacra. Giving brand value and aesthetic values to objects is realized through the increasing design value of industrial products at the production stage. The increase in research and development (R&D) expenditures also increases the value of indicators, symbols and brands on objects." Today, reality has been replaced* by images and the consumption of images (brand value, symbol).

According to Baudrillard (1998: 110), for the object of consumption to exist, it must first be transformed into a sign, a symbol. In this way, consumption refers to an active formation in which symbols and signs are systematically changed. Baudrillard emphasizes that consumption is not only an act of buying goods or services, but also a symbolic and semiotic process. Consumption thus means not only the satisfaction of a need, but also the construction and communication of a symbolic meaning. Baudrillard stated that consumption is not very much related to the concepts of utility or need and defined consumption in terms of signs or symbols. In this sense, consumption means the consumption of signs (symbols) and symbols. According to Baudrillard, consumption should be perceived not as a materialist process but as an idealist practice. The meaning of this perception is that what is consumed are thoughts instead of objects (Bocock, 1997: 75).

According to Baudrillard, consumption is an activity that has no direct relationship with objects and material goods: *"People have always bought, owned, enjoyed and spent money. However, they have not been characterized as 'consumers' for doing all these things; the 'feasts typical of primitive societies', the generosity of the feudal lord, the luxury expenditures of the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie are matters outside the sphere of consumption"* (Bauman, 2014: 240). Consumer society, according to Baudrillard (2004: 95), is not only a society where consumption is intense, but also a society where consumption is learned and socialized. This was made possible by the emergence of new forces of production and the monopolistic restructuring of a highly efficient economic system.

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[1] Simulacrum is defined as an appearance that wants to be perceived as a reality, while Simulate means to present something that is not real as if it were real, to try to show it. Simulation, on the other hand, is the artificial reproduction of a tool, a machine, a system, a way of functioning specific to a phenomenon through a model or a computer program in order to examine, demonstrate or explain it (Baudrillard, 1998).

Individuals of modern society are consumers. However, the amount of goods owned by consumers or the satisfaction of their needs is not enough to define the concept of consumption. According to Baudrillard, consumption is not a material way of life, the concept of abundance, or the sum of material or visual elements such as food consumed, clothes worn, vehicles used, images and messages. Consumption is rather the organization of all these as a meaningful whole (Baudrillard, 2011: 241).

Bauman, another theorist working on the concept of consumption, explains consumption and consumer society through globalization and global competition. Global competition;

> *"In order to push its way through the dense and dark jungle of the all-encompassing, "out-of-control", and to capture the public's attention, goods, services and images must arouse desire, and in order to do so, they must seduce their prospective consumers and repel their competitors. But once they have done this, they must quickly make room for other objects of desire, lest the relentless hunt for global profits and ever-greater profits be halted. Today's industry is tuned to the production of temptation and seduction."* (Bauman, 2014: 221).

Like Baudrillard, Bauman emphasizes that modern society is a society of consumption. According to Bauman, in order to increase people's potential to consume in a consumer society, consumers should never be given the opportunity to take a break. This is possible by keeping them relentlessly alert and vigilant, constantly exposing them to new temptations and thus keeping them in a state of excitement and suspicion that never subsides. The products and services offered to consumers must constantly innovate and differentiate in order to encourage them to want more, while promising to address this dissatisfaction (Bauman, 2014: 96).

Since the most unmanageable concept of the age is consumption, it is also possible to say that this concept is in relation with the society of the spectacle. As a matter of fact, there is a connection between Baudrillard's conclusions on the society of consumption and Guy Debord's theory of the society of spectacle. Because consumption has now evolved into a meaning such as 'showing what is consumed'. Today, showing what is consumed is realized through mass media and social media. Consumption has changed formally and actually created its own culture. A period in which consumption was done and shown at full speed had not yet been experienced until the invention of the internet. However, by means of the internet and technological developments, consumption has visibly increased and has become really visible. In virtual environments where everything is simulated,

people both have fun and shop while meeting all their needs. This is an indication that the current age has a different consumption culture than other ages.

### 3. Society of the Spectacle

The spread of consumption leads to the erosion and displacement of culture. In this case, consumption replaces the displaced culture with its own culture. This can also be seen as a different attempt to civilize society. The attempt to civilize the masses has created a society dominated by 'appearances'. Today, objects of consumption are increasingly transformed into images and become the main targets of capitalism. On the other hand, capitalism has created a situation by reducing existence itself to 'appearances'. Guy Debord tried to explain this situation with the concept of 'society of spectacle' and named his book after it (Debord, 1996: 13).

The concept of the society of the spectacle was introduced in 1967 by French anarchist, thinker and filmmaker Guy Debord. In his work *The Society of the Spectacle,* Debord emphasizes that capitalist society controls people through commodity fetishism by distancing them from each other. Capitalism labels all individuals as 'customers' and presents their physical and mental exploitation as 'spectacle' within the leisure and entertainment industry. In this society of spectacle, superficial shows are emphasized instead of reality and people begin to live under the influence of consumer culture. In this situation, people tend to see others as objects of consumption while presenting their own identities. The society of the spectacle weakens real connections and meanings, isolates people and creates a lack of communication. Debord sees spectacle as a fundamental feature of contemporary society. According to him, the spectacle tries to make the existing system more acceptable by concealing its irrationality. According to Debord, modern societies are a world of spectacle. The spectacle appears in various forms such as information, propaganda, advertising and entertainment and reflects the conditions and aims of the existing system (Evecen, 2018: 483).

According to Debord, the spectacle is the total occupation of social life by the commodity. According to the theory of the society of the spectacle, everything is left to representation. In societies dominated by modern production conditions, all of life is perceived as a gigantic accumulation of spectacle. Even direct experiences have become distant by turning into a representation. In other words, representation has come to the fore instead of reality and people have started to consume the represented life instead of the real life. In this case, as people focus on the spectacle, the importance of real experiences and direct experiences diminishes (Debord, 1996: 14). With the concept of the society of the spectacle,

it is as if an artificial nature has been created. Instead of real nature, a new nature of spectacle seems to have emerged. People create themselves in this artificial nature, present themselves and watch other people present themselves. In this situation, people do not care about reality but about the spectacle. While everyone makes their own presentation, they also watch and consume the presentations of others. While this artificial nature becomes a means of self-expression and self-promotion, it also becomes an object of consumption for those who observe it (Debord, 1996: 21). In the society of the spectacle, people always seem to be happy. However, this happiness is built with fear. Another important issue is that the society of spectacle produces its own spaces. Places of spectacle are also places of consumption and the best example is shopping malls. All objects of spectacle and consumption are exhibited and displayed here. The individual now puts himself/herself on display with the image-object he/she is wearing, thus becoming both objectified and subjectified. Featherstone evaluates this situation as follows (2005: 54):

> *"It requires discipline and control to move among the merchandise on display, to look around and not miss anything, to move randomly without interrupting the flow of the crowd, to glance around with a controlled grumble and weary look, to observe others without being seen by others, to tolerate the proximity of bodies to each other. It also requires the capacity to cope with the oscillations between intense interest and a more distanced aesthetic gaze."*

The Internet and social media play a major role in today's age of spectacle. Because the real show and exhibitionism is done through social media. People now present a false image of life by pretending to have been to places they have not been to, pretending to be happy when they are not happy, pretending to be rich when they have no money, pretending to have watched a movie they have not watched. In order to adapt to virtual identities, they pretend to belong somewhere, try to catch reality in falsities, pretend to have fun, and try to adopt their existence. All these are part of the show. Society is now lost between the virtual and the real, and they are in search of an image on a theater stage. In fact, people are after the simulated instead of the real. The idea that the fake things mentioned by Debord in his book *The Society of the Spectacle* (1996: 200) will eliminate the original in time is revealed here. Today's world, where even what is true is reconstructed to resemble the fake, is now a world of fake images. Fakes shape tastes and try to become permanent by destroying all kinds of possibilities so that they do not remind the original.

In the 21st century, there is more information and news, but much of this information is not meaningful. This is a sign of what Jean Baudrillard calls the age of simulation. According to Baudrillard, simulation is the copying of reality and replacing the original reality. Places like Lascaux stores and Disneyland are examples of places where copies of reality are produced. Such simulations blur the distinction between the real and the imagined, between right and wrong. With the proliferation of simulation in the world of consumption, reality and truth have gradually disappeared. This is due to the fact that the virtualization of everything makes truth impossible and facilitates and globalizes simulation. It is not only the means of consumption that are simulated. People working in companies such as McDonald's and Disneyland can also be seen as simulated people. These people are coded with well-defined roles and cannot go beyond them. They have very sharp and specific rules about how they look, what they wear, what they say and how they behave. The interactions that take place in virtual environments are also simulated. The meaning of real interaction has been lost. Today, the distinction between real and fake is about to be lost and simulated interactions are being made real (Ritzer, 2016: 176-179).

Mass media and new communication technologies undoubtedly play a major role in the formation of the society of spectacle. It is possible to say that surveillance and spectacle practices have spread rapidly through the media and the internet. In this sense, the fact that social media applications control and manage people's daily lives cannot be ignored. Social media is the best way to prove that individuals are happy, entertained and not alone. Social media is the easiest way for individuals to socialize themselves with the least cost, and what is shared on social media is actually not happiness, fun, pictures, but 'the disclosure of selves' (Ayan, 2016: 72). The power of virtual technologies is great enough to numb people's minds. People have transcended geographical barriers and spaces to a global network communication. In this new information-based world, there are masters of transpareAncy. Baudrillard draws attention to the distinction between globalization and universality. According to him, universality is about culture and values, while globalization refers to phenomena such as technology and communication. Not everything that is universal has to be global, but universality is a concept that melts into globalization and loses its originality (Baudrillard, 2006: 51-54).

## 4. On Women's Identity: Hegemonic Femininity, Pariah Femininities, and Postfeminism

The concept of hegemonic femininity refers to a specific form of female identity that is supported, reproduced, and changed in a society. This concept was first developed in the context of the concept of hegemonic masculinity, which was first put forward by Connell. Hegemonic masculinity is the qualities defined as masculine, which establish and legitimize a hierarchical and complementary relationship with femininity, and by doing so, guarantee the dominant position of men and the subordination of women (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005, 832). Although Mimi Schippers conceptualizes the concepts of masculinity and femininity as symbolic structures, she argues that masculinity and femininity are not static roles or fixed sets of behaviors adopted by women and men. According to her, the characteristics and practices defined as femininity and masculinity are constructed through overlapping and sometimes contradictory discourses. Since masculinity and femininity are produced, discussed and transformed through discursive processes, they are embedded in power relations and produce these relations (Schippers, 2007: 93-95).

There are other new femininities or discourses of femininity that develop in response to or in relation to the hegemonic femininity identity in a society. However, according to Rosalind Gill and Christina Scharff, important representatives of gender and femininity studies, the concept and research on femininities in the field of gender are ignored compared to research on the concept of hegemonic masculinity. (Gill and Scharff, 2011: 2- 3). Mimi Schippers' discussion on hegemonic and other femininities is groundbreaking.

"If hegemonic gender relations depend on the symbolic construction of desire for the feminine object, physical power and authority as characteristics that distinguish men from women and define and legitimize their superiority and social domination over women, then these characteristics should not exist for women. In order to guarantee men's privileged access to these characteristics, other configurations of feminine characteristics must be defined as deviant and stigmatized." (Schippers, 2007:95) Schippers defines "Pariah Femininities" in opposition to the hegemonic feminine identity. Pariah or excluded femininities are not subordinate femininities, but characteristics or practices that are simultaneously stigmatized and feminized when embodied by women in the environment. Females who exhibit hegemonic masculine characteristics are considered both feminine and undesirable. Therefore, they are stigmatized. Authority, physical violence, taking responsibility and disobedience are undesirable feminine aspects. Schippers argues that a woman is not masculine

when she is authoritarian, but is stigmatized as a “slut or shameless” because she is both feminine and undesirable and adopts a male identity characteristic (Schippers, 2007: 96). As a result, the existence and symbolic construction of excluded femininities make gender hegemony possible. Therefore, women who derive or represent excluded female identities are exposed to a range of effects, ranging from exclusion or discredit to concrete social sanctions due to these attitudes (Schippers, 2007: 96).

Postfeminism has discourses that emphasize that feminism and the feminist struggle that have been developed since the nineteenth century are no longer necessary. For this reason, it differs from the first wave feminist movements and deviates from its roots (Tosun Durmuş, 2024: 130-131). It is claimed that social content such as advertising and public relations campaigns that derive postfeminist cultural discourses actually harm the struggle for women's liberation, even though they pretend to adopt discourses of women's empowerment (Windels et al., 2020; Gill 2007; McRobbie 2009).

Postfeminism's interaction with capitalist production and neoliberalism has attracted the attention of many researchers. The relationship between postfeminism and metafeminism has been questioned by emphasizing the increasing postfeminist discursive content in advertisements that serves the sales and marketing of companies (Goldman et al. 1991: 333, Dahlbeck Jalakas, 2016). Instead, the argument that postfeminism is a new discursive formation that emerged as a result of the integration of feminism and neoliberalism is increasingly gaining support (Lewis et al., 2017: 217). Accordingly, postfeminist discourse has been articulated with neoliberal discourse by incorporating principles such as individual choice, empowerment and agency (Dean 2010: 392).

## 5. History of the Barbie Brand and Postfeminist Brand Narratives

Dolls and their derivatives have a wide range of products beyond production, including film and television content, games and digital experiences, music and live events. As the founder of the Barbie doll brand, Mattel collaborates with global entertainment companies as a leading global toy company. In addition to Barbie, Mattel also has world-famous brands such as Hot Wheels, Fisher-Price, American Girl, Thomas & Friends, UNO, Masters of the Universe, Monster High and MEGA, and the company's products and services are sold in more than 150 countries. (https://corporate.mattel.com/history)

Since Barbie was designed and launched in 1959 and her boyfriend Ken in 1961, Barbie's standardizing effect on the determination of female identities in American women and girls has been criticized. In the face of this social criticism

and due to increasing global sales and marketing strategies, Mattel has begun to include representations of different female identities in Barbie doll designs. Perhaps the first and biggest step in this regard was the production of the first black doll, Christie, in 1968. Starting from the 1980s and increasing at a rocketing rate in the 2000s, Barbie dolls became toys that embodied different femininities. Especially starting from the 1980s, when women entered the corporate workforce, the new generation Barbie dolls began to be portrayed as "strong" and "independent" individuals of neoliberal corporate life. Barbie, its advertising and marketing campaigns also closely followed these neoliberal and postfeminist women's empowerment discourses. The "We Girls Can Do Anything" campaign was launched in 1985. The campaign slogan, which was also given in TV commercials, derived the following postfeminist women's empowerment discourse: "We can dream and make them come true because nothin is worth doing that we girls can't do, and your mothers know that too. We girls can do anything, right Barbie?" (https://corporate.mattel.com/history)

With all these postfeminist and neoliberal discourses, this Barbie campaign adopted the femvertising advertising strategy that left its mark on the advertising and marketing field of the 2000s. Femvertising ads aim to reflect women outside of traditional roles and to produce advertising texts that disrupt gender discrimination. This advertising style, which has recently been adopted by many international brands such as Dove, Always and Barbie, is also called feminist advertising or "women-focused advertising" (Dahlbeck Jalakas, cited in Mustafa and Özay, 2022).

Since the 2000s, Barbie has continued to represent multiculturalism and all kinds of female identities in its products, as well as promotional campaigns that emphasize postfeminist and neoliberal values. Setting out to go beyond the standard Barbie beauty molds, the company introduced three new body types in 2016: curvy, petite and tall. The launch of new body types had such an impact that Barbie doll was put on the cover of Time magazine. In 2012, in order to draw attention not only to healthy bodies but also to women and girls with cancer, the Mattel Children's Foundation partnered with Barbie to produce Barbie's Friend Ella dolls (whose hair had fallen out due to treatment). In 2019, Mattel launched the world's first gender-neutral doll series, Creatable World (www.mattel.com).

## 6. The Consumption/Production of Barbie Femininities on Instagram, a Spectacle and Postmodern Consumption Space

When the movie 'Barbie' was released in theaters all over the world on July 21, 2023, the practice of coming to the movie dressed like Barbie was imposed on

social media. Many posts of women and girls who went to watch the movie looking like Barbie were shared on social media. Parallel to this trend, it has been observed that female users in social media, both in the world and in our country, share posts on Instagram accounts that act, dress or look like Barbie. In fact, male users' posts in the Ken image are also a considerable amount.

In this research, the posts of some female users in the world and in our country who share Barbie-like posts on their Instagram accounts will be examined and the findings will be analyzed through Baudrillard's concepts of simulacrum and simulation and the conceptualizations of femininity and postfeminist discourse.

### 6.1. Transformation of Simulacra into Simulation or Hyperreality into Reality: Real Women Who Enter the Barbie Box

The practice of product placement on social media platforms emerged in the 2000s as a type of marketing method. The popular social media network Instagram has recently been covered with content consisting of product promotions shared by social media influencers, especially Instabloggers, in areas such as food, fashion and travel (Öztürk et al., 2016, 356).

Indian Instagram influencer and blogger Riya Jain shared photos from the launch event of the special collection designed for Barbie by the famous shoe brand ALDO on her Instagram account with her followers. Jain, who entered the Barbie product box at the launch event, which featured pieces from Barbie's iconic pink world, experienced being a Barbie doll.




***Figure 1.*** *Barbie X ALDO Collection 2023*

***Source:*** *Riya Jain Instagram Profile Page (*https://www.instagram.com/p/CuwkQg5tecw/*)*

As seen in Visual 1, many world-famous clothing and fashion brands have used models similar to Barbie doll product boxes, marked with their own product logos, at points of sale in shopping stores and offered them to consumers for the sale and marketing of their Barbie-themed products. Similar models of Barbie product packages in these stores have also been included in cinemas, and a trend has begun for both viewers who go to watch the movie and customers who visit the Barbie sections of stores to pose as Barbie dolls in these models. Photos of women who enter Barbie packages were shared widely on many social media platforms in the summer of 2023, before the Barbie movie was released, causing a boom in Barbie-themed women posts. As seen in media posts, we can interpret the phenomenon of real women, girls and young girls wearing pink or Barbie-related branded products entering Barbie packages and presenting themselves as Barbie identities as a simulation of the hyperreal world created for Barbie dolls and the main character of this world, the Barbie woman. Thus, it is seen that a simulacrum world designed with toys, cartoons and movies related to the Barbie doll brand is brought down to our real world and embodied in movie theaters and stores.

According to the research findings, it is possible for female users with different identities who use Barbie products or engage in Barbie-like consumption in Instagram posts to show themselves as a part of the Barbie simulacra or this show culture.

Women who emphasize their individual and cultural identities with their posts in various ways such as menopausal Barbie, hijab or headscarf Barbie, mother Barbie, child Barbie, Moroccan Barbie, shalwar Barbie, abaya Barbie, etc. become a part of the Barbie show by simply wearing a pink dress or somehow resembling Barbie with a product they consume. The discursive subtext that recurs in the posts is the emphasis that the women who make all these Instagram posts can be Barbie despite their different identities, in other words, they can integrate with the Barbie identity. This emphasis is in line with a postfeminist discourse of femininity derived from the production and marketing strategy of the Barbie brand.

### 6.2. Muslim Barbie Representation

The number of young girls and women who present their identities as Muslim, headscarf-wearing or hijab-wearing (hijabi) on Instagram and share with Barbie is quite high. Some of them present themselves as hijabi or hijab-wearing Barbie by wearing only a pink headscarf or pink ethnic clothing.

ByHasanat introduces itself as a hijab clothing brand founded by two sisters with the mission of ensuring that women feel safe and elegant while protecting their beliefs and values. This brand carried out a marketing activity by making special designs for the Barbie movie with the “abaya and matching hijab Barbie” campaign. The sisters shared their satisfaction with being represented with ethnic clothing called abaya and headscarves and their Barbie movie cinema experiences on the social media application Instagram. It is seen that the shares emphasize ethnic and religious identity.

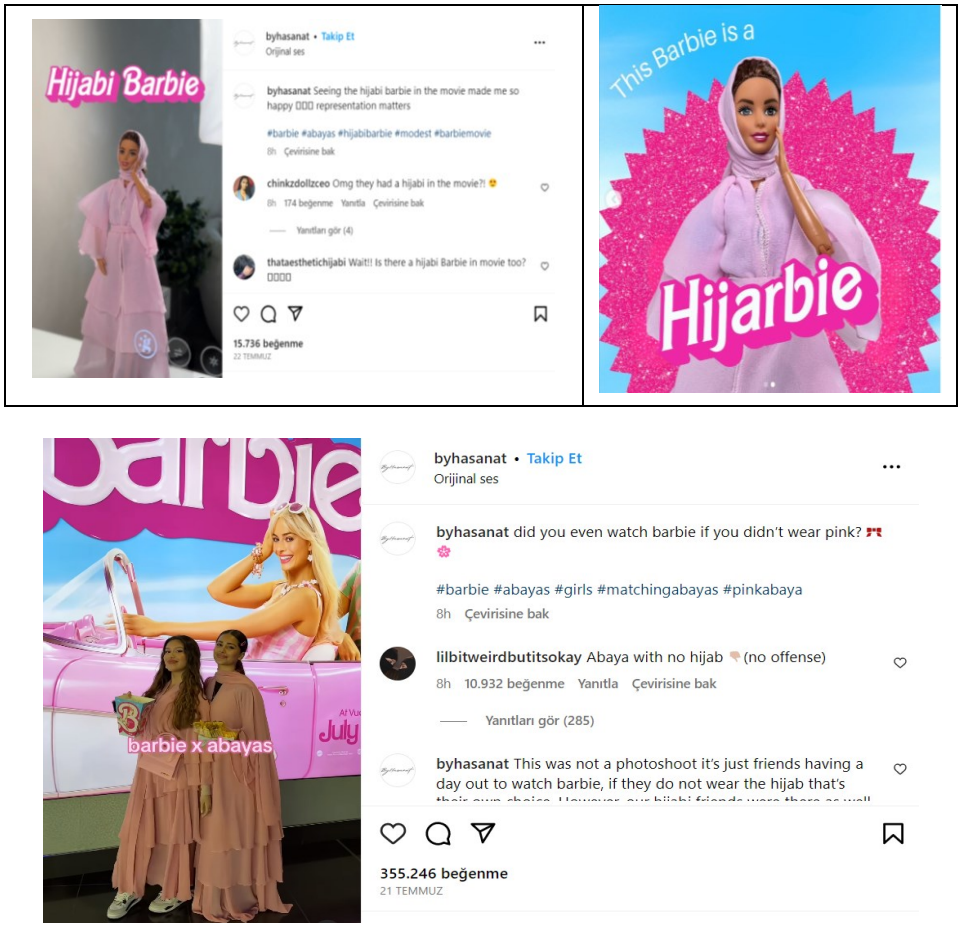



***Figure 2.*** *Hicabi Barbie*

***Source:*** *Byhasanat Instagram Profile Page (https://www.instagram.com/byhasanat/)*

Below, in a similar example, another fashion designer who shared on her Instagram account has adapted to the trend. She joined the trend by designing special Barbie-themed clothes.




***Figure 3.*** *Barbie designed clothes*

***Source:*** *Mawaddatul Haq Instagram Profile Page (https://www.instagram.com/mawaddatulhaq/)*

The postfeminist discourse of the Barbie brand, which embraces different women's identities and approves all kinds of women's preferences, is a discursive element that facilitates the articulation of women with the Barbie identity by emphasizing their differences. The Barbie movie also repeats a similar postfeminist discourse and constantly implies that Barbie is a brand that supports women with different religious, ethnic and sexual identities.



***Figure 4.*** *A still from the movie Barbie (Gerwig, 2024)*

*Source: Barbie Movie*

The Barbie movie, which was released in July 2023, also met many Barbie viewers with different qualities, while the veiled Barbie sitting next to Margot Robbie in a scene set in Barbieworld attracts attention.

### 6.3. Ethnic Barbie

It has been understood that the Barbie femininity model presented by the Barbie brand has been derived in different ways by women from different societies or ethnic identities through the use of elements such as ethnic clothing or appearance, and thus these different female identities can be included in the "spectacle" on social media through Barbie performances.




***Figure 5.*** *Barbie in a Local Kaftan*

***Source:*** *Widad Dahchar Instagram Profile Page (*https://www.instagram.com/p/Cu5IrMtsrwq/*)*

Moroccan digital content producer Widad Dahchar, in her video sharing on her Instagram account, "Moroccan Barbie is watching Barbie," interprets the kaftan, a local and traditional dress for women, with the Barbie theme and identifies herself with Barbie.

### 6.4. Menopausal Barbie

There are also many Barbie-themed Instagram posts that emphasize the times when women are in various physical states such as pregnancy, menopause, old age or obesity and when they are outside the classic Barbie model of perfect body size.




***Figure 6.*** *Menopausal Barbie*

***Source:*** *Tamsen Fadal Instagram Profile Page (https://www.instagram.com/p/Cs6OXVRP7bF/)*

American journalist and author Tamsen Fadal, who is also a menopause activist, is among the celebrities who have joined the Barbie trend. She interacted with her followers by asking which outfit is suitable for menopausal Barbie in a post she made on her Instagram account.

### 6.5. Mother but Barbie Emphasis: "Mothers Can Be Barbies Too"

Another celebrity who has joined the Barbie trend in Turkey is Turkish TV actress Seda Bakan. The actress, who recently became a mother for the second time, emphasized that mothers are Barbies by saying Barbie's iconic greeting "Hi Barbie" in a post she made on her Instagram profile page with her daughter in her pink outfit.




***Figure 7.*** *"Mothers are Barbies too."*

***Source:*** *Seda Bakan Instagram Profile Page* (https://www.instagram.com/p/CvIRISlNQUr/?img_index=1)

In Turkey, the relationship between women's sexual identity and motherhood is problematic in the context of the conservative discourse of femininity. As Tosun Durmuş (2021) discussed, even Westernist, Islamist, and Turkist intellectuals engaged in intense debates about this notion of femininity, particularly between motherhood and sexual identity, through newspapers and magazines, the primary media tools of the Second Constitutional Era. The attitudes and behaviors of women who emphasize or somehow imply female sexual identity after becoming mothers are negated by the conservative discourse of femininity and pushed outside the boundaries of acceptable femininity (Mustafa, 2021, 29-30). It is possible to evaluate this post of the actress in the context of pariah femininity, a type of femininity that is excluded by the conservative discourse of femininity. A Barbie post that becomes a mother and emphasizes feminine or female sexual identity normalizes the association of motherhood and sexuality by going beyond conservative femininity and allows the woman to adopt both motherhood and female sexual identity at the same time, thus articulates the sexual identity that is excluded from the maternal identity back to this female sign through the Barbie sign.

### 6.6. Local and National Trans Barbie Example: Barbie Diva

As a result of the combinations of femininity and Barbie in forms that can extend forever, one of the main reasons why Barbie simulacra is constantly reproduced in the digital space is that Barbie has become the empty signifier of a postfeminist discourse of femininity. Everyone and everything has become referable as Barbie.

The famous name of Turkish classical music, trans vocal artist Bülent Ersoy, joined the Barbie movement and appeared as Barbie in her concert with special Barbie-themed pink clothes and accessories. The artist, who interacted with her fans through the social media application, shared the following regarding the Barbie movement: "The Barbie file is closed, sir :)". Among all these posts, Ersoy's post can be shown as one of the few women who can make an original discursive conjunction by indicating Barbie femininity with her individual identity.




***Figure 8.*** *Trans Barbie*

***Source:*** *Bülent Ersoy Instagram Profile Page (https://www.instagram.com/p/Cv23FQTIaZ-/)*

Bülent Ersoy's sharing can be expressed as one of the most original and elaborate Barbie performances since she has managed to make references to both her personal identity and Barbie by claiming Barbie with her own uniqueness. It can be considered that Ersoy's depiction of Barbie is another individual artistic configuration of her performances. Hence, this kind of representation differs from

the rest of the Instagram posts of women who mostly underlined their collective identities like ethnic or religious identity and such a representation of Ersoy as an artist stands distinctive in terms of its artistic and personal identity claim.

## 7. Conclusion

With the development of the Barbie brand on a global scale, it has been observed that it has started to include different women and children's identities in its product range, which it has maintained for many years. In the first period of production, Barbie doll products, which were only blonde and had regular body measurements and had Western female appearance, have recently been increasingly represented with women in different identities. In addition to housewife or always well-groomed Barbie, women in professional professions, disabled or sick women, non-Western geographies such as African, Asian, etc. instead of white and Western, have been represented among Barbie dolls. Thus, it is understood that the Barbie doll and toy brand, whose sales are increasing in different societies as a global brand, has increasingly adopted a multicultural and even "think global, act local" production and sales strategy.

In parallel with the global sales strategy and marketing campaigns, a post-feminist discourse of femininity is also emphasized in the Barbie movie released in 2023. Postfeminism, as a discourse that also derives from neoliberalism, is a discourse of femininity that emphasizes that all kinds of individual preferences of women should be honored and accepted, and approves all kinds of female identities, even if they are sexist and antifeminist.

As can be understood in the context of the discussion of postmodern thinkers and especially Baudrillard, the reason why the Barbie advertising campaign was accepted by people is not the persuasiveness of the advertisements or the advertisements themselves, but the dominant discourses presented through the advertisements. In the case of Barbie, this discourse is the postfeminist neoliberal discourse of femininity, which has recently become widespread in traditional and new generation media, from social media content, advertising and public relations campaigns to TV series and movies, and has even become hegemonic on a global scale.

It is seen that women engage in both modern and postmodern consumption activities by using branded products emphasizing Barbie and sharing in the Barbie "show" on social media. Modern and postmodern forms of consumption appear simultaneously in Instagram posts. On the one hand, we witness that all kinds of Barbie-influenced products are produced and consumed in real life, in the market and on the street with a modern consumer culture mentality, and on the other hand,

in the context of postmodern production and consumer culture, Barbie products and the use of Barbie female identity are shared on social media platforms, and different versions of Barbie femininity, which is a simulacrum, are both produced and reproduced with the shares, thus producing new hyperreal female identities.

The reason why women adopt dressing, acting or appearing like Barbie, despite knowing that Barbie is not a real woman, is that a certain femininity discourse is presented with the Barbie movie and the media discourses derived afterwards. Here, it is seen that the Barbie movie and media production have derived a postfeminist femininity discourse. In other words, the postfeminist femininity discourse that every woman can be anything she prefers emphasizes a liberal and free femininity narrative. This postfeminist discourse, which supports that women can adopt any identity they want, is derived together with the Barbie "image". It is said that every woman can be like Barbie even if she does not meet Barbie standards, and can derive a Barbie identity as she wishes.

Here, Barbie presents her own reality to society as a simulacrum, and Barbie, as a female identity, can be a representation of femininity that all women freely and in various ways associate with their own identities. The new generation Barbie character, defined within a postfeminist and neoliberal discourse, becomes a part of our reality as a simulacrum performed by real women. Thus, a postmodern femininity identity in which the boundaries of reality are blurred is shown to society with every Barbie post, and local or various excluded femininities can both make themselves visible and exist through this simulacrum, on the condition of being like Barbie (i.e. dressing like Barbie or producing something similar to the Barbie character in some way). A social media platform like Instagram has become a kind of "spectacle" where all kinds of consumption are exhibited, as postmodernist thinkers imagine. We witness that the Instagram posts examined within the scope of this study allow individuals to expose themselves with the image-objects on them, thus on the one hand, individuals "reify" themselves as a doll like Barbie (reduce themselves to an object and a hyperreal female identity), and on the other hand, they emphasize their subjectivity by referencing their different or excluded femininities.

All in all, with discursive conjunctions such as Veiled Barbie, Moroccan Barbie, Mother or Menopausal Barbie, all these different "signs" of femininity make identity differences visible and acceptable. Through the discursive possibilities opened up by Barbie's postfeminist discourse and consumer culture, women prefer to present their other or "pariah/excluded" female identities at the expense of "reifying" themselves in this space of spectacle.

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