



The Cultural Impact of the Latest Barbie Movie: A Muslim Perspective

As adherents of Islam, we continually strive to live in accordance with our faith and values while nurturing our children's spiritual growth. Given the pervasive influence of modern media, it is essential to analyze and understand the content that our children are exposed to. One of the latest media phenomena that warrants our critical attention is the newly released Barbie movie.

Over the years, the Barbie brand has become a global cultural mainstay, often criticized for its potential impact on young girls' perceptions of beauty, femininity, and societal roles. The latest movie in the series, however, takes the Barbie influence to an alarming and unprecedented level by introducing themes and narratives that starkly contradict the core values and principles of Islam.

The film embraces a hardline feminist narrative in the guise of promoting equality and empowerment. This messaging is problematic, not for the pursuit of equality, but because it undermines the sanctity of motherhood and unfairly maligns men. Islam respects and values the integral roles of both genders, fostering mutual respect and cooperation. However, the movie's narrative vilifies all male characters, leading to the harmful assumption that men are oppressors and women should seek absolute independence. This harmful stereotype is not only a gross misrepresentation of gender dynamics but also sows seeds of discord between the sexes.

The Prophet ﷺ emphasizes the importance of a woman's role at home, "Take care of your home, for that is your Jihād" (Aḥmad). In this context, Jihād is the epitome of Islamic life. Declaring homemaking as Jihād for women is giving it the highest possible status in an Islamic society. A woman's role in the upbringing of children is like the archers in the battle of Uhud; it may seem less significant but is pivotal to the success of society at large.

The Barbie movie introduces transgenderism in a subtle manner. Characters initially presented as male, transition into Barbie figures that outshine the original female characters. The Barbie and Ken dolls' lack of genitals becomes a repeated gag, with Barbie declaring that she "doesn't have a vagina" and Ken "doesn't have a penis". This seems inappropriate and potentially confusing for a children's movie.

An alarming aspect of the movie is the dismissal of motherhood, a role Islam venerates as one of the highest honors for women. Using the iconic Barbie figure, the movie implies that motherhood should not be an aspiration for young girls, an idea that contradicts our faith's teachings. In Islam, mothers are held in the highest esteem, and their crucial role in shaping society and future generations is heavily emphasized. This is highlighted in the teachings of the Prophet ﷺ where a woman's housework is considered to be on par with the men's struggle in the way of Allah.

It is narrated that some of the female Companions came to the Prophet ﷺ complaining that the men had taken all the rewards of fighting in Jihād. "What kind of deeds can we do," they asked, "to reach the level of those men who fight in the way of Allah?" The Prophet ﷺ replied, "The housework that one of you does is enough to reach the level of those men who fight in the way of Allah" (Musnad al-Bazzār and Abū Ya'lā).

It is also narrated that a woman came to the Prophet ﷺ and said, "O Messenger of Allah, the women have sent me to you. [As we know], Jihād is binding upon men: if they are injured, they are rewarded, and if they die, they will remain alive with their Lord with lavish provision. But what do we women, who do all this work for them, get?!" The Prophet ﷺ replied, saying, "Tell any woman you meet, that if a woman obeys her husband and gives him his due respect, she will get the likes [of his fighting in Jihād]. But how few of you do that!" (Musnad al-Bazzār and Mu'jam at-Tabrānī). Not only is it an all-important task, but women are also uniquely qualified to do it. It is not by accident that pregnancy and nursing are purely feminine tasks. Allah has given women the special talents and psychological makeup needed to take care of children.

In the movie Barbie does not want to be with Ken, or any other Ken for that matter. In fact, at one point in the movie, she advises Ken that he too should, like her, not be dependent on any one person or any one thing but simply just be himself. This is psychological message that women and men should be independent, totally self-determining beings.

Furthermore, the movie introduces elements of LGBTQ+ content which is abhorred in Islam. A character portrayed by a male actor cross-dressing as a Barbie features in the movie, and Ken is depicted taking pride in the attention he garners from two homosexual males. There is also a scene that features various discontinued Barbie and Ken dolls, including 'Growing up Skipper' (a doll with enlarged breasts), 'Sugar Daddy' (an older Ken doll), and 'Earring Magic Ken' (popularly known as 'Gay Ken'). The Mattel headquarters building is referred to as 'phallic' and revealed to featured 'gender neutral' bathrooms. These instances risk desensitizing audiences, particularly young viewers, to a lifestyle that is not compatible with our Islamic beliefs.

The characters in the film appear to promote a cynical message of a culture that is all about power. Power is how self-worth is determined. Therefore, anyone who is not in power is unimportant.

This clearly contradicts the Islamic narrative that has given everybody a role and has attached importance and significance to human beings based on their piety and effectiveness within their role, irrespective of the power they hold. The film maligns the Kens for establishing the patriarchy in Barbie land, but then celebrates the Barbies for regaining control and treating the Kens in the same contemptuous, controlling, and demeaning sense as they were.

Islam calls for a supportive relationship between males and females, each fulfilling a unique role that facilitates the harmonious running of the world under what is essentially a patriarchy. Men fill the roles of leaders, commanders, protectors, and providers, while women take on the tasks of

nurturing, educating, homemaking, and supporting the family. Both of these roles complement each other and are of equal importance to society. There is no power struggle between men and women as each gender has a role and field in which their strengths are appreciated and very much needed.

Media content such as this, can lead to the normalization of ideologies that deviate from our Islamic values. This issue is not exclusive to this Barbie movie; it is representative of a larger cultural shift in media content that we, as parents and educators, need to be mindful of.

In conclusion, as Muslims, it is our duty to scrutinize the media content our children consume. We must be alert to potentially harmful ideologies propagated through seemingly innocuous mediums and take proactive steps to counteract them. This involves educating our children about Islamic values and principles and nurturing their spiritual growth. The new Barbie movie serves as a stark reminder of the media's power in subtly influencing young minds. It underscores the need for continued vigilance and guidance to ensure our children develop a strong moral compass grounded in our faith.