

ESSAY #15 – Hannah McCall
First Place - \$2,000 prize
Wilton High
Emerson College – Film Production

Barbie

When the Barbie movie was released on July 21st, 2023 I was beyond excited. I watched the movie two times in theaters, once with my friends and another time with my mom and grandmother. Watching this movie with my family versus my friends was a very different experience. When I watched Barbie the second time the quote "We mothers stand still so our daughters can look back to see how far they've come" stood out to me. I looked over to my grandmother and mom and for the first time, I saw two generations of sacrifices that have given me the opportunities I have today.

My mom was born in 1974 which is the year The Equal Credit Opportunity Act was passed giving women the right to apply for credit cards. My Grandmother was born in 1945 a year after The United Nations established The Commission on the Status of Women which protects women's rights internationally. My great-grandmother who will turn 99 this year was born in 1925 which is 5 years after women had the basic right to vote in the United States. Looking back at the influential women and role models in my life I am shocked by how many generations of women had restricted rights and opportunities. What surprised me even more was how close that past injustice felt to my own life in 2024. This spring I registered to vote and knowing that my great-grandmother was born when that wasn't expected makes me feel proud to fill out a ballot.

The Barbie movie's portrayal of the "real world" is reminiscent of the reality many women still face in America. Listening to America Ferrera's monologue made me feel seen for the first time in a movie theater. "always stand out and always be grateful. But never forget that the system is rigged. So find a way to acknowledge that but also always be grateful." This movie was unapologetically feminine with bright pink colors and fun costumes but it got right to the heart of the injustice women feel but often cannot voice for themselves. My future career path in media and film production is male-dominated and this quote addresses the expectation many women filmmakers feel to be grateful when they achieve the same level of success as their male counterparts. Additionally, if a movie produced by a woman is seen as "too girly" it is often not taken seriously and the deeper meaning behind it is swept away. I recently did a project on a film by Sophia Coppola and then created a short film with feminine elements. Both videos had positive feedback but most people did not perceive a deeper meaning and deemed the films simply "fun" and "cute".

There is a huge level of ignorance in our society surrounding female expression and language. A woman in power is more likely to be deemed rude or hard to work with than a man in the same position. This double standard is exaggerated and pointed out in the Barbie movie

through how Ken is perceived in the “real world” versus how Barbie is seen. While Barbie is harassed and second-guessed, Ken can walk through the same world with comfort and respect. After watching this film I walked out of my local cinema intent to become more engaged with civil discourse and issues in my town. This year I have had conversations with the Wilton League of Women Voters, Collaborated with Wilton Pride by creating a video depicting an event for the Wilton Historical Archive, and was just awarded The Wilton Democratic Town Committee “Civic Leadership Award” for my political activism and contributions to civil causes. I can credit the Barbie movie for initiating my community involvement but as the Barbies say when they win an award, “I worked really hard for this! I deserve it.”