

MOVIE REVIEW: DOLL WARS AND THE PERILS OF PERFECTION

by Panda Kroll, Esq.



“Barbie,” which opened July 21 in theatres everywhere, is equal parts existential meta-comedy, musical theater, feature-length Mattel commercial/documentary and homage to classic cinema memes, including a parody of the monolith scene from Stanley Kubrick’s “2001: A Space Odyssey.” Breathless headlines about the

film include *Rolling Stone’s* “Barbie May Be the Most Subversive Blockbuster of the 21st Century;” *The New Yorker’s* “Barbie Is Brilliant, Beautiful, and Fun as Hell;” and *Variety’s* “Greta Gerwig Makes Box Office History as Barbie Scores Biggest Opening Weekend Ever for Female Director.” Award for most erudite reference goes to *MSNBC*, “Ken is a bell hooks critique come to life in Barbie.” Rotten Tomatoes gives the film a 90% rating. The film even scored a “Google Takeover:” Anyone who googles the names of cast members or Barbie herself gets a surprise: The whole page turns pink and animated pink fireworks spark across the screen.

Atlantic Records released the soundtrack – “Barbie: The Album” – on the same day as the film, featuring familiar voices such as Lizzo and Billie Eilish. Several music videos were produced in association with the album. Dua Lipa performs “Dance the Night,” and Columbian sensation Karol G introduces Barbie fans to reggaeton in “Watati.” Most notable: Nicki Minaj and Ice Spice ride flying motorcycles in their breakout hit, “Barbie World (with Aqua).”

“Barbie World” generously samples Aqua’s 1997 hit Europop single “Barbie Girl.” That’s evidence of Mattel’s new openness to the deconstruction of its valuable intellectual property as a means of recapturing the franchise’s eclipsing relevance, lost somewhere between Barbie’s debut in 1959 and the wildly successful launch in 2001 of a competing franchise, edgy, multi-ethnic Bratz “friend group.” The two doll makers’ federal and state IP lawsuits – both sides seeking billion-dollar damages – kept attorneys busy from 2004 through 2018, encompassing two jury verdicts and multiple reversals. In the end, only the verdict awarding Bratz its lawyers’ fees survived (\$140 million).

As for Aqua, shortly after “Barbie Girl” was released, describing Barbie as a “Blond Bimbo Girl in a Fantasy World,” Mattel sued Aqua’s label, MCA, for trademark infringement, claiming both disparagement and dilution; MCA counter-claimed for defamation. Then-9th Circuit Chief Judge Alex Kozinski issued a pithy opinion affirming summary judgment in favor of



Affordable, Reliable
& Convenient

**VENTURA
MEDIATION
CENTER**

805.643.1052

www.arc4adr.com

*Neutrals Available
In Person and
Statewide Via Zoom*

Ventura Mediation Center Welcomes

Mike Strauss, Esq.
Employment Mediator



In his long career as an employment litigator, Michael (Mike) Strauss developed a creative approach to resolving employment disputes. The employer-employee relationship can operate much like a family, where strong emotions rule and hurt feelings abound. To account for this dynamic, Mike has a soft touch. He deescalates animosity by projecting calmness, reason, clarity, and understanding. Nevertheless, Mike has never been afraid to stand up for what is right and fair. Having litigated hundreds of cases for employers and employees through trial or arbitration and argued appeals at every level, including the US Supreme Court, Mike draws on his vast experience and calm demeanor to guide cases to settlement. Since

2022, Mike has used his creative approach to resolving employment disputes as a mediator for the very types of cases he litigated as an attorney: wage-and-hour class/PAGA actions and individual disputes involving harassment, discrimination, retaliation, and breaches of contract.



Hon. Frederick
H. Bysshe (Ret.)



Philip
Barbaro, Jr., Esq.



Lori M.
Dobrni, Esq.



Hon. Frank J.
Ochoa (Ret.)



Hon. Vincent J.
O'Neill, Jr. (Ret.)

the band on the basis that the song was privileged under the First Amendment as a parody. See, e.g., “If this were a sci-fi melodrama, it might be called Speech-Zilla meets Trademark Kong,” *Mattel v. MCA Records*, 296 F.3d 894, 898 (9th Cir. 2002). Kozinski dismissed the counter-claim as nonactionable “rhetorical hyperbole” and concluded the opinion, “The parties are advised to chill.”

Margot Robbie purchased the film rights to Barbie in 2018 and as producer, brought in actress-turned-screenwriter Greta Gerwig to direct. Robbie stars as Stereotypical Barbie, but multiple Barbies and Kens embody the film’s feminist-Pinocchio theme. There’s Issa Rae (President Barbie), Kate McKinnon (Played-With-Too-Hard Barbie), Dua Lipa (Mermaid Barbie) and Hari Nef (Trans Barbie). These female personas play opposite multiple Kens, led by Ryan Gosling, and including Sima Liu, Kingsley Ben-Adir, and John Cena. America Ferrera, however, brings home the film’s core message, as a mother from the Real World who, with her angst-y teen daughter brings the counter-argument, i.e., Barbie’s role in engendering misogyny. In Ferrera’s epic monologue, she calls out the “impossible assignment” women face “being all things to all people.” Ken, too, has an existential challenge: “Barbie has a great day every day, but Ken only has a great day if Barbie looks at him,” Helen Mirren explains in a voice-over. After discovering patriarchy in the Real World and embittered from being overlooked as Barbie’s eternal “plus one,” Ken leads a “Ken-bellion” and converts Barbieland from a plastic paradise into a dystopian “Kendom” and Barbie’s playhouse into a Mojo Dojo Casa House.

Ultimately, Barbie comes to terms with the contradictory demands of womanhood and Ken, wearing a tie-dye hoodie that proclaims “I am Kenough” realizes that his existence is independent from Barbie’s.



Panda Kroll practices complex timeshare litigation in federal court and is the founder of the **Timeshare Law Library**. She is a member of **CITATIONS’** editorial board.



YOUR FERTILITY LAWYER

ADOPTION | SURROGACY
IVF | REPRODUCTIVE LAW

- » Build your family with confidence - Decades of experience to navigate the most complex cases
- » Personalized & compassionate legal services that advocate for your rights



YOURFERTILITYLAWYER.COM

(8 1 8) 2 2 2 - 0 0 1 0

