

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Identity is a fundamental aspect of human life that shapes how individuals perceive themselves and their role in society. It is influenced by personal experiences as well as cultural symbols and societal expectations. Identity is also a complex multi-dimensional construct that is central to an individual's sense of self and social interaction. Psychologically, it refers to a cohesive understanding of one's values, beliefs, and life goals (Fivush et al., 2021). Identity construction is not a static process; rather, it is a dynamic journey shaped by an individual's interaction with their social environment, culture, and personal experiences.

A clear sense of identity provides individuals with a moral and social compass, enabling them to make choices aligned with their internal values and to navigate societal expectations (Cote & Schwartz, 2020). Conversely, an identity crisis as described by Erikson (1968) occurs when individuals face uncertainty or conflict in understanding themselves, often triggered by external pressures or life transitions (Klimstra et al., 2021).

The film *Barbie* (2023), directed by Greta Gerwig, reinterprets the legacy of this iconic doll through a feminist lens, causing arguments about identity, gender roles and societal expectations. Since her introduction in 1959, Barbie has evolved from a simple fashion doll to a cultural symbol that reflects and reinforces society's

views on femininity, beauty, and ambition (Rogers, 1999). Over the decades, Barbie has been celebrated for inspiring young girls to pursue diverse careers and criticized for perpetuating unrealistic beauty standards and gender stereotypes (Lauzen & Dozier, 2023).

The portrayal of Barbie as a perpetually perfect figure, often accompanied by Ken, has been widely seen as a reflection and reinforcement of patriarchal ideals about the "ideal" woman's role in society. However, the film offers a subversive reinterpretation that explores the identity crises of both Barbie and Ken, moving them from objects of projection to subjects who struggle to find meaning beyond the expectations imposed on them.

The film's narrative forces Barbie to redefine herself beyond her stereotypical role. Meanwhile, Ken embarks on a journey to establish an identity separate from his socially assigned role as Barbie's accessory. This narrative critically examines the codependent nature of rigid gender roles in society (Donovan & Donovan, 2023). Through this subversion, the film *Barbie* (2023) serves as a relevant subject for analyzing how modern media can both mediate and critique the construction of identity, particularly in relation to rigid gender roles.

In *Barbie* (2023), the main character starts a journey to learn more about themselves. On this journey, they reflect on who they are and what they want to be. They also consider what others expect of them. The film depicts Barbie's existential struggle as she questions her predetermined role in a seemingly perfect world and confronts the complexities of real-life gender dynamics. By raising these issues, the film offers a humor and seriousness to critique the gender roles of men and women

in society.

This study aims to analyze the identity crisis and societal expectations depicted in the film *Barbie* (2023) using a social identity approach by Henri Tajfel. This study examines how the film critiques and reconstructs gender roles by exploring the characters' struggles with self-doubt, societal expectations, and the search for meaning. Through a textual analysis of narrative elements, character development, and cinematic techniques, the study will deepen our understanding of how popular culture reflects and challenges societal expectations.

1.2 Research Problems

Based on the research background, there are two research questions needed to be answered by this study, namely:

1. How do the main characters, Barbie and Ken, experience and represent identity crisis in *Barbie* (2023) film?
2. How does the film *Barbie* (2023) criticize beauty standards and gender stereotypes that influence Barbie and Ken's identity construction?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

Based on the statements of the research question, there are two objectives of this study, namely:

1. To analyze how the main characters, Barbie and Ken, experience and represent identity crises in the film *Barbie* (2023).
2. To examine how the film *Barbie* (2023) critiques beauty standards and gender stereotypes, and how these societal norms influence the identity

construction of Barbie and Ken.

1.4 Scope of the Study

This research focuses on analyzing the representation of identity crisis and societal expectations in the film *Barbie* (2023). Specifically, it will discuss how the film depicts the characters struggles in dealing with self-doubt and finding purpose in life. It critiques beauty standards and gender stereotypes while exposing how societal expectations are reconstructed. The analysis will include the characters journeys, interactions, and symbolic elements used to convey these themes. The scope of this research is to identify how *Barbie* (2023) represents identity crisis and societal expectations through character dynamics, storyline, cinematographic and visual symbols, explored through a pop culture lens.

1.5 Previous Studies

The three academic journals discussed below serve as foundational secondary sources, providing a critical context for the theoretical framework and research design of this study.

The first study, conducted by Fitriyah and Farah Diva Anindya (2024), titled “*The Archetypal and Stereotypical Depiction of Barbie in the Barbie’s Film (2023) by Greta Gerwig*,” shows an understanding of Barbie's character. Utilizing Carl Jung's archetypal theory, the authors analyze the psychological factors influencing Barbie’s journey, focusing on how specific archetypes such as the "Great Mother" and the "Imposter" intersect with and challenge the stereotype of Barbie as the

"perfect woman." This research provides a detailed psychological examination of Barbie as a singular character navigating societal expectation.

Complementing this, the second study by Arvhi Mega Utami and Nadhifa Khoirun Nisa (2024), titled "*Existential Crisis: Redefining Ken's Character in the Barbie Film*," shifts the focus to Ken, a character often marginalized in previous analyses. Their research employs an existentialist framework to examine Ken's transformative journey of self-discovery. By analyzing his struggle against societal expectations and his eventual realization that he must find an identity independent of Barbie, this study provides a crucial exploration of his personal development and sense of purpose.

Finally, the third study, "*Representasi Analisis Kebebasan dan Penjara Sosial dalam Tayangan Film Barbie*" by Salma Puteri Andanie and Misyi Gusthini (2024), broadens the scope by examining the film through the lens of freedom and social boundaries. This research highlights Barbie's struggle against gender roles and the vital role of female solidarity. It underscores the difficulty of achieving true freedom within societal stereotypes, encouraging viewers to challenge social constraints.

While these three studies provide significant and diverse insights into the film *Barbie* (2023), a notable research gap remains. The existing literature tends to analyze Barbie and Ken's journeys in isolation. For instance, Fitriyah and Anindya's work is exclusively focused on Barbie, while Utami and Nisa concentrate solely on Ken. This fragmented approach prevents a comprehensive understanding of how their parallel journeys for self-discovery are interconnected and mutually

influential. Furthermore, while Andanie and Gusthini address broader themes of gender and social boundaries, their research does not deeply explore how the personal quest for a cohesive identity serves as the fundamental driver of these struggles.

Therefore, the novelty of this research lies in its integrated and comparative analysis of both Barbie and Ken's struggles for self-discovery. This study will move beyond a separate examination of each character and instead investigate their interwoven narratives. By analyzing their parallel quests to define themselves outside of rigid societal expectations and prescribed gender roles, this research aims to provide a more holistic and nuanced understanding of the film's central themes. This approach is new and has not been explored in depth by previous scholarly works.

1.6 Research Methods

This research is classified as a qualitative textual analysis to examine how *Barbie* (2023) portrays identity and societal expectations. This research methodology consists of three components.

1.6.1 Sources Data

The primary data sources for this research are scenes from the film *Barbie* (2023) itself. The analysis focuses on the narrative and visual elements of the film, including scenes, dialogues, and cinematographic elements. Secondary data sources include scholarly articles, books, and critical essays relating to the film, gender studies, and the theoretical framework that guides the analysis.

1.6.2 Methods of Collecting Data

The writer uses library research to collect data. As stated by Mary W. George “library research involves identifying and locating sources that provide factual information or personal/expert opinion about a research question, a necessary component of every other research method at any given time” (2008:6). Library research involves a step-by-step process used to gather information to write a paper, make a presentation, or complete and review of both primary and secondary sources, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the film and its critical reception. Based on the definition above, the writer obtains the data from the *Barbie* (2023) film scene as the main data, as well as some relevant journals and articles as the supporting data.

1.6.3 Methods of Approach

The author uses the social identity approach to analyze the intrinsic and extrinsic aspects of the data obtained from *Barbie* (2023). The social identity approach is a term used in social psychology to describe two different theories. Social identity theory and self-categorization theory by Henri Tajfel and John Turner introduced the concept of social identity as a way to explain intergroup behavior. It is a theory that predicts certain intergroup behavior based on perceived group status differences, the perceived legitimacy and stability of those status differences, and the perceived ability to move from one group to another (1986:7). Then self-categorization theory is a social psychological theory that explains the circumstances under which a person will perceive a set of people (including

himself) as a group, as well as the consequences of perceiving people in group terms (Turner, 1987). These theories help to examine how the film portrays identity crisis, gender roles, and societal expectations, particularly through the identity construction of Barbie and Ken.

1.7 Writing Organization

In this research, there are five chapters that each explain about:

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This chapter gives the reader a brief overview of this study. In this section, the author explained the background of the study, research problem, objectives of the study, scope of the study, previous studies, and research method.

CHAPTER 2: INTRINSIC THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

In this chapter, the author discusses some theories and concepts which are intrinsic aspects include film theory, narrative elements, and cinematography elements.

CHAPTER 3: EXTRINSIC THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

In this chapter, the author discusses some theories and concepts which are extrinsic aspects include film theory,

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter analysis intrinsic and extrinsic aspects for completing the research question.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

The last chapter contains the final conclusion of the analysis by summing up the important point of the study.