



Barbie's Existential Awakening: Existential Questions of Identity and Meaning in Barbie (2023)

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Abstract: Greta Gerwig's Barbie (2023) illustrates how popular cinema can act as a platform for philosophical exploration, especially viewed through the perspective of existentialism. Though the movie is well-known for its satirical examination of gender roles and consumer culture, it additionally offers a deeper storyline that explores themes of identity, mortality, and meaning. The background of the study lies in the increasing recognition of film as a cultural text capable of reflecting and challenging philosophical issues. The aim of this study is to examine Barbie's existential problem and Ken's concurrent quest for independence through the lenses of Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Martin Heidegger, and Viktor Frankl. Using a qualitative approach, the study employs detailed analysis of important scenes to explore themes of freedom, responsibility, authenticity, and the quest for meaning. The findings reveal that Barbie's interface with imperfection and mortality represents Heidegger's concept of being-toward-death, whereas her choice to accept humanity signifies Frankl's logotherapy. Ken's reinterpretation of masculinity reinforces Beauvoir's and Sartre's focus on identity shaped by one's own choices. In the end, the research finds that Barbie goes beyond mere entertainment, providing a relatable yet deep examination of existentialist concepts and showcasing the philosophical possibilities of popular film.

Keywords: *Barbie, existentialism, identity, freedom, meaning*

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INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, film studies have increasingly intersected with philosophy, with scholars applying diverse schools of thought such as phenomenology, critical theory, and post-structuralism to cinematic texts. This trend reflects the recognition that films are not merely entertainment but complex cultural texts capable of engaging with profound philosophical questions. Within this broader discourse, existentialism has emerged as a particularly relevant framework for analysing contemporary popular cinema, given its focus on freedom, authenticity, and the search for meaning in a rapidly changing world.

In current academic discourse, film is increasingly acknowledged not just as amusement but as a cultural work that both mirrors and challenges philosophical inquiries. Movies frequently act as reflections of society, representing worries, hopes, and ideological conflicts. Greta Gerwig's *Barbie* (2023), though promoted as a mainstream hit, showcases this dual purpose. At first glance, the movie seems like a light-hearted commentary on consumerism and gender roles, but beneath its colourful visuals is a deep exploration of existential themes related to identity, liberty, and significance.

The need to examine *Barbie* through this lens arises from the film's worldwide cultural influence. In a time of increased consciousness regarding gender issues and identity conversations, *Barbie* connects with viewers in various settings. The storyline of the film—focusing on Barbie's encounter with flaws, mortality, and the disintegration of her perfect world—mirrors the shared human challenge of articulating life amidst ambiguity. This thematic richness places *Barbie* in the context of existentialist thought, resonating with the ideas of Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Martin Heidegger, and Viktor Frankl.

Numerous earlier studies have analysed *Barbie* with perspectives of feminism, cultural criticism, and narrative examination. Aprilia & Amelia (2025) point out that *Barbie*'s existential

dilemma challenges the narrative coherence of her idealized universe, whereas Elhaq (2024) highlights the feminist aspect of *Barbie*'s experience, framing her conflict through Beauvoir's analysis of objectification. Utami and Nisa (2024) extend the discussion to include Ken, contending that his new interpretation of masculinity represents existential independence. These analyses collectively highlight the philosophical depth of the film; however, few have thoroughly examined *Barbie* as a text of existential exploration that includes various philosophical perspectives.

Existentialism, as a philosophical approach, highlights the individual's engagement with freedom, accountability, and the irrationality of existence. Sartre's concept of existence previous essence questions the notion of an inherent identity, claiming that people must shape their own identities through their decisions. Beauvoir expands this framework to encompass feminist philosophy, contending that women need to rise above objectification to attain genuine existence. Heidegger's idea of being-toward-death highlights mortality as essential to authenticity, while Frankl's logotherapy focuses on finding meaning through suffering and taking responsibility. These frameworks offer a strong perspective for examining *Barbie*'s transformation from fantasy to genuineness.

The novelty of this study lies in its combination of existentialist philosophy with the cinematic examination of a popular film. Although existentialist interpretations have typically emphasized art-house or philosophical films, *Barbie* shows that popular culture can also act as a platform for philosophical contemplation. This paper situates *Barbie*'s narrative within existentialist discourse, contributing to film studies and philosophy by emphasizing how mainstream media makes complex ideas accessible.

Several scholars have examined the philosophical and cultural dimensions of *Barbie* (2023), particularly through the lens of existentialism and feminist existentialism. The

first article is “Existential Crisis in Barbie Film (2023)” written by Aprilia and Amelia published in *Acuity: Journal of English Language Pedagogy, Literature and Culture*, explore Barbie’s confrontation with existential questions of meaning and identity. Drawing on Viktor Frankl’s notion of “search for meaning” and Lacanian psychoanalysis, they argue that Barbie’s journey from the artificial perfection of Barbie-land to the imperfect reality of human life reflects a profound existential crisis. Their study highlights how the film dramatizes the tension between essence and existence, ultimately suggesting that authenticity requires embracing imperfection.

Similarly, Pienrasmi, Amalia, Verawati, and Poyo (2024) in “Existentialist Feminism in Barbie Movie (John Fiske Semiotics Study)” published in *Al Huwiyah: Journal of Woman and Children Studies*, analyze the film through the framework of Simone de Beauvoir’s existentialist feminism. Using John Fiske’s semiotics, they show how Barbie’s narrative challenges patriarchal structures by emphasizing women’s freedom to define themselves beyond societal expectations. Their study underscores the film’s feminist existentialist message: that women must actively construct their own meaning rather than passively accept imposed identities.

Corrigan and Prystash (2025), in their article “Self-Effacing Barbie: The Ideal, the Real and the Quest for Authentic Selfhood” published in *Film-Philosophy*, situate Barbie within broader philosophical debates about authenticity. They argue that Barbie’s self-effacement—her willingness to abandon the idealized image of perfection—signals a philosophical quest for authentic selfhood. The authors connect Barbie’s narrative to existentialist themes of alienation, freedom, and the struggle to live authentically in a commodified world.

Finally, Byrnes, Loreck, and May (2025), in “She’s Everything: Feminism and the Barbie Movie” published in *Feminist Media Studies*, focus more explicitly on feminist theory but still touch upon existentialist concerns. They examine

how the film negotiates the tension between cultural stereotypes and individual agency, showing that Barbie’s journey resonates with existentialist ideas of freedom and responsibility. Their analysis emphasizes the film’s cultural significance as both a feminist critique and a philosophical exploration of identity.

This study is grounded in existentialist philosophy, a school of thought that emphasizes individual freedom, authenticity, and the search for meaning in an otherwise indifferent or absurd world. Central to existentialism is Jean-Paul Sartre’s dictum that “existence precedes essence,” which asserts that human beings are not defined by predetermined roles or essences but must actively construct their identities through choices and actions. This principle is particularly relevant to *Barbie* (2023), where the protagonist confronts the tension between her socially constructed identity as a “perfect doll” and her desire for authentic existence.

In addition to Sartre, the framework draws upon Simone de Beauvoir’s existentialist feminism, which highlights the ways in which women are often constrained by societal expectations yet retain the freedom to transcend them. De Beauvoir’s notion of woman as “the Other” resonates with Barbie’s struggle against patriarchal norms and her pursuit of self-definition beyond commodified ideals. This perspective allows the film to be read not only as an existential narrative but also as a feminist critique of cultural structures that limit agency.

Furthermore, Viktor Frankl’s concept of “meaning-making” provides another dimension to the analysis. Frankl argues that individuals can endure suffering and absurdity by discovering personal meaning, a theme reflected in Barbie’s journey from the artificial perfection of Barbie-land to the imperfect but meaningful reality of human life. Her transition illustrates the existentialist idea that authenticity and significance are found not in conformity but in embracing freedom and responsibility.

By integrating these philosophical perspectives, the theoretical framework positions

Barbie as a cinematic text that dramatizes existential concerns. It provides the analytical lens through which the film's narrative, characters, and symbolism can be examined, situating the movie within broader debates on existentialism, feminism, and cultural critique in contemporary cinema.

The primary objective of this study is to investigate Greta Gerwig's *Barbie* (2023) through the lens of existentialist philosophy, with particular attention to themes of authenticity, freedom, and the search for meaning. By examining how the film's narrative dramatizes existential concerns such as identity formation, alienation, and the tension between essence and existence, this research seeks to uncover the philosophical depth beneath its seemingly playful surface. Furthermore, the study aims to highlight the intersection between existentialist thought and feminist critique, demonstrating how Barbie's journey challenges societal norms while affirming individual agency.

Moreover, the film's worldwide reception highlights its significance as a venue for cultural interaction. Just as subtitled movies enhance cross-cultural comprehension, *Barbie* serves as a cultural text that conveys philosophical concepts to varied audiences. Its lively tone and vivid imagery do not lessen its profundity; instead, they improve its approachability, enabling existential themes to connect with audiences who might not delve into philosophical literature.

METHOD

This study employs qualitative research methods. According to Creswell, qualitative research offers a way to investigate and comprehend the significance that individuals or groups assign to a social or human issue (Creswell, 2013). Qualitative research focuses on interpretation, description, and the creation of conceptual frameworks related to its topics. In this study, the human issue being explored is the existential crisis illustrated in Greta Gerwig's *Barbie* (2023).

Film analysis lends itself well to qualitative methods since cinema acts as a cultural text that

expresses meaning through storytelling, symbolism, and character evolution. The existential themes present in *Barbie*—identity, freedom, anxiety, and authenticity—necessitate interpretive analysis instead of quantitative assessment. Qualitative research enables the investigator to examine how these themes are depicted, how they align with philosophical theories, and how they add to wider cultural discussions.

Data Source

The primary data source is the theatrical release of *Barbie* (2023), viewed in its official digital copy for consistency. As a single case study, the film itself constitutes the central text under investigation. Secondary data sources include peer-reviewed academic articles that discuss *Barbie* in relation to existentialism and feminist philosophy (e.g., Aprilia & Amelia, 2025; Elhaq, 2024; Utami & Nisa, 2024). These works were not treated as supplementary reading but as comparative references that informed coding categories and interpretive validity.

Research Instruments

Close Reading as the researchers conduct a close reading of *Barbie* (2023), concentrating on significant scenes where existential themes are prominently displayed. This included examining conversation, visual symbols, and story framework. Specific focus was directed towards instances of crisis (e.g., Barbie facing mortality, Ken's quest for identity) and resolution (e.g., Barbie's decision to accept humanity). The scenes were subsequently analyzed using existentialist perspectives, encompassing Sartre's concept of freedom, Beauvoir's feminist existentialism, Heidegger's idea of authenticity, and Frankl's logotherapy.

Data Collection

The data collection method for this research relied on textual identification and thematic coding. The researcher analyzed scenes, conversations, and visual symbols in *Barbie* (2023) that align with existentialist ideas, closely observing how these components mirrored larger



philosophical issues. In this process, the film's story was understood as a collection of interrelated themes, such as Barbie's awakening to her identity beyond a stereotype, her decision to exit Barbie Land as an expression of freedom and accountability, her face-off with mortality as an instance of existential dread, and Ken's transformation of identity as a quest for authenticity and significance. These thematic groups offered a structure for grasping the existential challenges depicted in the film. Alongside the main film analysis, additional information was collected from academic articles that explore Barbie concerning existentialism and feminist philosophy, including works by Aprilia and Amelia (2025), Elhaq (2024), and Utami and Nisa (2024). These references provided comparative perspectives and enhanced the understanding of the film's existential aspects, guaranteeing that the examination was rooted in both cinematic proof and scholarly discussion

Data Analysis

This study is of a qualitative type. Data analysis included thematic interpretation, wherein identified scenes were analyzed concerning existentialist ideas. The researcher utilized philosophical theories to assess how the film portrays existential themes. For instance, Barbie's encounter with death was examined via Heidegger's being-toward-death, whereas her decision to accept humanity was understood through Frankl's logotherapy.

The caliber of analysis was maintained by correlating cinematic evidence with philosophical writings and academic research. Interpretive validity was enhanced by examining various viewpoints and recognizing the ambiguities present in existentialist dialogue.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of Greta Gerwig's *Barbie* (2023) reveals that the film functions not merely as a playful satire of gender roles and consumer culture but as a profound exploration of existentialist themes. Through its narrative, dialogue, and symbolic imagery, the film engages with questions of identity, mortality, meaning, authenticity, and the philosophical potential of

popular culture. This section expands upon the initial findings, offering a deeper and more comprehensive discussion of each thematic category.

Crisis of Identity

One of the most striking discoveries in *Barbie* is the portrayal of an existential crisis through the breakdown of identity. At the beginning of the film, Barbie epitomizes the perfection of Barbie Land—a utopian realm where every day is flawless, pain is absent, and identity is fixed. This static perfection reflects what Sartre critiques as “bad faith,” the denial of freedom and responsibility by clinging to predetermined roles (Sartre, 1943/1993).

Barbie: “I’m just get embarrassed”

Another Barbie as her friend: “Barbie don’t get embarrassed”

(Sequence: 00:16:00 - 00:17:55)

The sudden emergence of flaws—flat feet, intrusive thoughts of death, and emotional instability—marks the onset of existential distress. These anomalies disrupt the illusion of stability and force Barbie to confront the unsettling truth that her identity is not preordained but must be actively shaped. Aprilia & Amelia (2025) argue that this moment embodies Sartre's concept of anguish, the awareness that existence precedes essence and that individuals must define themselves through choices. Barbie's realization destabilizes her sense of self, compelling her to embrace the liberty and accountability of self-definition.

Ken's concurrent crisis reinforces this conclusion. His recognition that he cannot merely exist as “Barbie's accessory” highlights the fundamental human desire for independence. Utami & Nisa (2024) contend that Ken's journey reshapes masculinity by emphasizing autonomy rather than dependence, thereby broadening existentialist motifs beyond Barbie herself. Ken's struggle illustrates Simone de Beauvoir's existentialist feminism, which insists that identity must be constructed freely rather than imposed by external structures (Elhaq, 2024).

Ken's concurrent crisis reinforces the film's existentialist themes by extending them beyond Barbie's journey. His realization that he cannot merely exist as “Barbie's accessory” reflects the fundamental human desire for autonomy and self-definition. From Sartre's perspective, Ken's struggle embodies the principle that “existence

precedes essence”: he is not inherently defined by his role as Barbie’s companion but must actively construct his own identity through choices and actions. His dissatisfaction with being reduced to a secondary figure dramatizes Sartre’s notion of bad faith, where individuals deny their freedom by accepting externally imposed roles. Ken’s eventual recognition of his independence marks a movement toward authenticity, as he begins to acknowledge his freedom and responsibility for self-definition.

Simone de Beauvoir’s existentialist feminism further illuminates Ken’s transformation. While Beauvoir primarily analyzed the condition of women as “the Other,” her insistence that identity must be freely constructed rather than imposed by external structures applies equally to Ken’s crisis of masculinity. Utami and Nisa (2024) argue that Ken’s journey reshapes masculinity by emphasizing autonomy rather than dependence, challenging patriarchal expectations that define men only in relation to women. Elhaq (2024) similarly notes that Ken’s struggle illustrates Beauvoir’s broader existentialist claim: authentic identity arises when individuals reject imposed categories and embrace freedom.

Thus, Ken’s development is not merely a subplot but a philosophical extension of the film’s existentialist framework. His crisis underscores that both men and women must confront the tension between imposed identities and authentic selfhood. By situating Ken’s journey within Sartre’s emphasis on freedom and Beauvoir’s insistence on self-construction, the film broadens its existential motifs, presenting identity formation as a universal human challenge rather than one confined to Barbie alone.

Thus, the crisis of identity in Barbie dramatizes existentialist concerns about freedom, responsibility, and authenticity. Both Barbie and Ken embody the anguish of realizing that identity is fluid, contingent, and subject to choice.

Confrontation with Mortality

Another significant discovery is the film’s engagement with death. Barbie’s abrupt realization of mortality introduces existential dread, echoing Heidegger’s notion of being-toward-death. For Heidegger, mortality is central to authenticity because it forces individuals to confront the finitude of existence (Heidegger, 1927/2010).

Weird Barbie: “What perceive of this?”

Barbie: “Oh nothing, just fun game of volleyball, ... and thoughts of death”
(Sequence: 00:19:28 - 00:20:36)

Barbie’s encounter with death disrupts the fantasy of Barbie Land, exposing the fragility of perfection. The film suggests that death is not merely a narrative device but a philosophical catalyst. By acknowledging mortality, Barbie moves closer to genuine existence. This confrontation with death parallels the existentialist emphasis on finitude as a condition for authenticity.

Moreover, the film’s playful yet serious treatment of death underscores its accessibility. As Elhaq (2024) notes, the film’s tone does not diminish its philosophical richness but instead makes existential concepts approachable for audiences unfamiliar with philosophical texts. Barbie’s confrontation with mortality thus becomes a vehicle for viewers to reflect on their own finitude and authenticity.

The Search for Meaning

The film also emphasizes the quest for meaning. Barbie’s decision to leave Barbie Land and pursue human existence mirrors Viktor Frankl’s belief that meaning is discovered through responsibility and engagement with life’s difficulties (Frankl, 1946/2006). Her choice reflects Frankl’s logotherapy, which posits that meaning can be found even amidst suffering.

Barbie: “I’ll miss you guys”
Barbie’s friend: “I bet every single woman will say thank you and give you a really big hug”
(Sequence: 00:24:22 - 00:25:40)

Barbie’s acceptance of humanity, despite its unpredictability, demonstrates existential courage. She embodies the existentialist conviction that meaning is not inherent but constructed through lived experience. Ken’s journey further illustrates this theme. Initially, he seeks significance through domination and control, but he ultimately realizes that authentic existence requires self-definition independent of external validation.

This search for meaning resonates deeply with Camus’s notion of the absurd, which arises from the tension between humanity’s desire for coherence and the world’s silence. Life’s unpredictability and lack of inherent meaning compel individuals to construct significance



through their actions (Camus, 1942/1991). Barbie's embrace of humanity reflects the courage to live authentically within the absurd, choosing to affirm existence despite its contingency. Her decision dramatizes Camus's insistence that authenticity is not found in escaping absurdity but in confronting it directly, thereby transforming despair into creative responsibility.

The absurd in Barbie also intersects with Lacanian psychoanalysis, particularly the movement from the Imaginary to the Real. Barbie Land, as a utopian illusion, represents the Imaginary Order where meaning appears fixed and coherent. The collapse of this illusion—through Barbie's confrontation with mortality and imperfection—forces her into the Real, the domain of existential truths that resist symbolic containment. In Lacanian terms, the absurd manifests when the Imaginary fails to provide stability and the subject encounters the Real, a space where the lack of inherent meaning becomes unavoidable.

By linking Camus and Lacan, the film illustrates how existential authenticity emerges when illusion is abandoned and the absurd is embraced. Sartre's principle that "existence precedes essence" is dramatized in Barbie's recognition that her identity is not predetermined but must be freely constructed. Heidegger's being-toward-death is echoed in her confrontation with mortality, which grounds her authenticity in finitude. Beauvoir's existentialist feminism resonates in her rejection of imposed roles, affirming that meaning must be created through freedom rather than conformity. Frankl's logotherapy further enriches this framework, showing that meaning is discovered not in comfort but in responsibility and engagement with life's challenges.

Thus, the absurd and Lacanian concepts are not peripheral but integral to the film's existentialist discourse. Barbie's journey from the Imaginary illusion of perfection to the Real confrontation with death exemplifies the human struggle to live authentically within the absurd. The film demonstrates that meaning is not given but must be constructed through freedom, responsibility, and the courage to face existential truths.

Symbolism of Reality

The symbolic contrast between Barbie Land and the real world constitutes a central axis of the film's existential inquiry. Barbie Land functions

as a utopian illusion, a space of synthetic perfection where suffering, mortality, and uncertainty are excluded. It represents what Sartre would call a "bad faith" existence—an evasion of freedom and responsibility through conformity to predetermined roles. In Barbie Land, identity is fixed, beauty is unquestioned, and meaning is externally imposed. This denial of contingency reflects humanity's tendency to flee from existential anxiety by clinging to comforting illusions.

By contrast, the real world embodies the absurdity and unpredictability of existence. It is a space where imperfection, aging, and death are unavoidable, and where individuals must confront the limits of their freedom.

Barbie: "I'm not pretty anymore"

Gloria: "What? You're so pretty"

(Sequence: 01:11:10 - 01:16:11)

The dialogue illustrates this confrontation. Barbie's lament signals her awakening to existential vulnerability, while Gloria's reassurance reflects the human struggle to find meaning and affirmation in imperfection. This moment dramatizes Sartre's insistence that freedom requires facing the contingency of existence, and Heidegger's claim that authenticity arises only when one acknowledges mortality as an inescapable horizon.

This symbolic difference highlights the existentialist belief that authenticity arises from accepting reality rather than fleeing into illusion. Sartre emphasizes that freedom requires confronting the contingency of existence, while Heidegger insists that authenticity requires acknowledging mortality. Barbie's transition from Barbie Land to reality dramatizes this philosophical movement from illusion to authenticity.

Barbie's transition from Barbie Land to the real world thus symbolizes the philosophical movement from illusion to authenticity. Her choice to leave the artificial paradise and embrace reality signifies an existential act of freedom: the acceptance of responsibility for her own existence. This act resonates with Frankl's logotherapy, which emphasizes that meaning is discovered not in comfort but in confronting suffering and limitation.

The symbolism also aligns with Lacan's psychoanalytic categories of the Imaginary, Symbolic, and Real. Aprilia and Amelia (2025) argue that Barbie's identity is initially formed

within the Imaginary Order, sustained by cultural ideals of perfection and consumerist fantasy. Her confrontation with mortality and imperfection forces her into the Real, where existential truths cannot be denied. The real world, in this sense, becomes the site of both anxiety and liberation, compelling Barbie to construct an authentic self beyond the illusions of the Imaginary.

The film's symbolism also resonates with Lacan's psychoanalytic categories of the Imaginary, Symbolic, and Real. Aprilia & Amelia (2025) argue that Barbie's identity is initially formed in the Imaginary Order, sustained by cultural ideals of perfection. Her confrontation with mortality and imperfection forces her into the Real, where she must grapple with existential truths. This symbolic journey underscores the film's philosophical depth.

The existential themes in *Barbie* (2023) can be further illuminated through Lacanian psychoanalysis, particularly his triadic categories of the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real. At the beginning of the film, Barbie's identity is firmly situated within the Imaginary Order, a realm sustained by cultural ideals of perfection and fantasy. Barbie Land epitomizes this Imaginary space: flawless, static, and detached from existential realities such as death or imperfection. Her identity is defined by images of beauty and idealized roles, reflecting Lacan's notion that the Imaginary is bound to illusions of wholeness and stability.

The disruption of this perfection—manifested in Barbie's flat feet, intrusive thoughts of death, and emotional instability—marks her entry into the Symbolic Order, where language, social structures, and cultural codes impose limits on identity. The dialogue "Barbie don't get embarrassed" (Sequence: 00:16:00–00:17:55) illustrates this shift, as Barbie begins to experience emotions and vulnerabilities that contradict the rigid codes of Barbie Land. This transition parallels Sartre's critique of "bad faith," since Barbie must now confront the instability of identity rather than rely on predetermined roles.

Her confrontation with mortality, however, forces her into the Real, the domain that resists representation and exposes the limits of both Imaginary illusions and Symbolic structures. Death, as Heidegger emphasizes, is the ultimate horizon of existence, and Lacan's Real captures this unassimilable truth. Barbie's admission of "thoughts of death" (Sequence: 00:19:28–00:20:36) dramatizes this encounter with the

Real, compelling her to grapple with existential truths that cannot be denied or symbolically contained.

Aprilia and Amelia (2025) argue that Barbie's identity is initially formed in the Imaginary Order but is destabilized by her confrontation with imperfection and mortality, which thrusts her into the Real. This symbolic journey underscores the film's philosophical depth, showing how existentialist concerns about freedom, authenticity, and meaning intersect with Lacanian psychoanalysis. Barbie's movement from the Imaginary to the Symbolic and finally to the Real dramatizes the human struggle to reconcile illusion, cultural codes, and existential truth.

A final observation is the film's demonstration that popular cinema can serve as a medium for philosophical reflection. Gerwig's *Barbie* integrates existential themes into an accessible narrative, making complex ideas available to audiences who might not engage directly with philosophical literature.

Elhaq (2024) observes that the film's playful tone enhances rather than diminishes its philosophical richness. By embedding existentialist themes in a mainstream cultural product, Gerwig illustrates how philosophy can permeate everyday life. This discovery underscores the originality of the research: *Barbie* exemplifies how popular culture can function as a philosophical text, enriching the dialogue between philosophy and society.

The film thus challenges the boundary between high culture and mass entertainment, demonstrating that philosophical inquiry can emerge from unexpected sources.

Collectively, these findings illustrate that *Barbie* (2023) presents existentialist themes in a manner that is both accessible and profound. The crisis of identity, confrontation with mortality, search for meaning, symbolism of reality, and philosophical potential of popular culture together highlight the film's depth.

Moreover, the findings emphasize the universality of existential questions. Barbie's journey illustrates the human struggle to understand existence amidst uncertainty, while Ken's parallel narrative underscores the collective dimension of this struggle. By situating these themes within a popular film, Gerwig demonstrates that existentialism extends beyond academic philosophy and influences everyday life and culture.



Ultimately, Barbie exemplifies how cinema can serve as a site for philosophical reflection, bridging the gap between theory and lived experience.

CONCLUSION

The results of this research show that Greta Gerwig's *Barbie* (2023) is a movie that goes beyond mere entertainment and delves into philosophical exploration, especially existentialist ideas. Although the film is promoted and largely enjoyed as a humorous critique of gender roles and consumerism, its narrative complexity and symbolic framework enable it to be interpreted as a work that portrays the essential dilemmas of human life. The main character of the film, Barbie, experiences a significant change that reflects the existential journey from illusion to reality, from rejecting mortality to embracing freedom and responsibility, and from a passive identity to an active self-definition.

Central to the film is Barbie's struggle with flaws and the inevitability of death. In Barbie Land, she is known as "Stereotypical Barbie," a character characterized by flawlessness, consistency, and the absence of pain. However, the encroachment of death into her awareness shakes this identity, compelling her to face the vulnerability of her being. This moment echoes Heidegger's idea of being-toward-death, suggesting that mortality is crucial for authenticity as it urges individuals to recognize the limits of life. Barbie's abrupt recognition of mortality serves not just as a plot mechanism but as a philosophical moment, compelling her to let go of the illusion of eternity and accept the truth of human constraints.

Ken's parallel narrative reinforces these existentialist themes by extending them to questions of masculinity and independence. His recognition that he cannot merely exist as "Barbie's accessory" dramatizes Sartre's principle that "existence precedes essence," as he must actively construct his identity rather than accept an imposed role. At the same time, his struggle resonates with Beauvoir's existentialist feminism, which insists that authentic identity must be freely chosen rather than defined by external structures. Ken's journey illustrates how existential independence applies not only to women but also to men, broadening the film's philosophical scope and underscoring the universality of the human struggle for autonomy and authenticity.

The movie also portrays the quest for purpose, a key theme in Viktor Frankl's logotherapy. Frankl claimed that meaning is found through taking responsibility and confronting life's challenges, even amid suffering. Barbie's choice to depart from Barbie Land and adopt human existence embodies this belief. Her decision reflects the existentialist view that meaning is not provided but formed, and that a genuine existence demands bravery to face uncertainty. In embracing humanity, Barbie acknowledges both pain and liberation, demonstrating the existentialist conviction that true authenticity comes from facing reality instead of fleeing into fantasy.

The results additionally emphasize the importance of popular culture as a means for philosophical contemplation. Gerwig's *Barbie* incorporates existential themes into a broadly relatable story, rendering complex concepts accessible to audiences who might not directly interact with philosophical writings. Elhaq (2024) observes that the film's lighthearted tone does not lessen its philosophical richness but instead improves its approachability. This discovery highlights the uniqueness of the research: *Barbie* illustrates how popular culture can serve as a philosophical work, enhancing the conversation between philosophy and society. By placing existentialist themes in a popular film, Gerwig shows that philosophy extends beyond academic discussions and influences daily life and culture.

While this study has demonstrated the film's existential depth, it is limited by its focus on a single case study. Future research could expand the analysis by comparing *Barbie* with other contemporary films that engage existentialist or psychoanalytic themes, thereby enriching the dialogue between philosophy and cinema.

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