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Childhood Trauma and The Defense Mechanism of Denial in Barry Allen from *The Flash* (2023)

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Abstract: *The research aimed to analyze the representation of childhood trauma and the defense mechanism of denial in the Barry Allen character in The Flash. The research employs descriptive qualitative methods with a psychoanalytic approach that combines the structural model of the soul presented by Sigmund Freud, primarily the interaction of id, ego, and superego, as well as the idea of a mechanism of self-defense described by Anna Freud. The initial data, which includes both conversational transcripts and cinematic visual elements, is obtained through detailed observations and systemically analyzed using interactive model analysis. Research findings indicate that Barry Allen childhood trauma suffered from the unresolved tragic murder of his mother resulted in severe neurotic anxiety. Unlike the usual passive coping mechanism, this research emphasizes the phenomenon of "denial in action," referred to through elements of science fiction superheroes. Barry's denial of reality transforms into an active and destructive obsession as he continues to control space and time to stop the tragedy. This extreme form of denial culminates with the emergence of his alter ego, dark flash, symbolizing an irrational attempt to change the past, thus threatening the stability of the multiverse. Finally, the research concludes that the timing of a movie serves as a cinematic metaphor for avoiding unfinished experience and trauma, affirming that true psychological healing can be achieved only through a process of acceptance of painful realities*

INTRODUCTION

Superhero films increasingly explore the psychological trauma that underlies their action-filled narratives. *The Flash* (2023), directed by Andy Muschietti, exemplified this trend by illustrating the childhood trauma of Barry Allen, the protagonist, caused by his mother's death and the unfair arrest of his father, as a major psychological conflict in the narrative. Unlike the typical superhero story, where the past inspired a heroic act, Barry's childhood trauma triggered an obsessive denial of reality, which was seen through the manipulation of time. This coincides with studies related to adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), which suggest that many individuals

throughout the world have faced at least one traumatic event in childhood, making childhood trauma a broad psychological issue with long-term consequences on individual development (Lee et al., 2022). When the traumatic experience is not handled in the right way, individuals create a variety of defensive means to keep the ego from overwhelming emotional burdens. One of the most basic defense mechanisms is denial, which is where the individual refuses to acknowledge painful facts in order to maintain a psychological balance.

Individual phenomena trapped in the past as a result of untreated trauma have become an increasingly important social reality in contemporary society. In popular culture, psychological issues such as trauma and defense mechanisms are often presented via various media forms, especially movies. As an element of today's culture, film has had a profound impact on people's perception of social and psychological realities. However, in numerous heroic film narratives, psychological character conflicts are frequently concealed by aspects of action, technology, and science fiction like time travel or the multiverse. Consequently, the psychological messages embedded in the narrative are frequently ignored by viewers, leading them to perceive the character's extreme actions merely as entertainment, without grasping the deeper emotional backdrop.

Previous studies have examined defense mechanisms in fictional characters using a Freudian psychoanalytic approach. Defense mechanisms function as instruments of repression that help individuals cope with extreme psychological stress (Hardian, 2025). Other research indicates that the mechanism of denial is generally used as a passive and unconscious strategy to avoid feelings of guilt resulting from past tragedies (Setyo & Nugroho, 2024). Furthermore, inner conflict resulting from loss often triggers emotional expressions such as anger or rejection of social reality (Wijaya & Kurniawati, 2025). Although these studies make important contributions to understanding the mechanism of denial, most literary and film research still positions denial predominantly as a passive emotional response limited to an individual's internal psychological reactions.

Based on previous research, there remains a research gap in the study of denial mechanisms in the superhero film genre, particularly those involving the manipulation of space and time. Classical psychoanalysis, as proposed by Anna Freud (1936), explains that denial does not only manifest through thoughts or speech but can also be expressed through actions. However, previous literary studies have rarely discussed how such active forms of denial are represented in science fiction narratives. Therefore, this research is necessary to explore how denial mechanisms are visualized through extreme actions in superhero stories, so that psychological escape from trauma is not merely emotional but is also manifested through grand actions that have the potential to cause harm.

This research focuses on Barry Allen in *The Flash* (2023), directed by Andy Muschietti. This film was selected for the focus of this research because it illustrates intricate psychological struggles, especially the childhood trauma endured by the protagonist resulting from his mother's tragic death. This childhood trauma compels Barry Allen to reject the truth of his loss by journeying through time to alter the past. This action demonstrates how behavioral denial significantly influences the plot. Drawing from this context, this research is organized around two primary research questions:

1. How is Barry Allen's childhood trauma portrayed in *The Flash* (2023)?
2. How does Barry Allen demonstrate denial resulting from the trauma as a defense mechanism in *The Flash* (2023)?

In line with these research questions, the primary objective of this research is to depict the representation of childhood trauma and reveal the manifestations of denial mechanisms in Barry

Allen using Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic approach. This research is expected to provide a theoretical contribution to the development of psychoanalytic studies of literature and film, particularly in understanding how defense mechanisms can serve as the primary drivers of narrative conflict. Furthermore, this research is expected to raise public awareness regarding the destructive impact of unresolved trauma and the importance of understanding defense mechanisms as part of mental health.

The uniqueness of this research lies not in the discovery of a new psychological concept, but rather in the application of the classical psychoanalytic concept of "denial in action" to modern science fiction narratives. Unlike previous studies, which have largely discussed denial as a passive response, this research demonstrates that *The Flash* utilizes the concept of time travel as a cinematic metaphor to depict active denial. Barry Allen's act of time travel not only represents a heroic act but also serves as a form of psychological escape from the reality of a loss he has not been able to accept. Therefore, this research demonstrates that classical psychoanalytic theory remains relevant for analyzing contemporary popular cultural phenomena.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Freud's Psychoanalysis, Neurotic Anxiety, And Modern Psychological Critiques.

This research is grounded in Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory. The theory categorizes human personality into three primary components: the id, the ego, and the superego. The id functions based on the pleasure principle, the superego acts as a moral compass, and the ego's role is to mediate between the id and the superego in the real world (Freud 1923). These three components continually interact within a sophisticated psychological structure, thereby influencing an individual's actions. In this situation, the ego plays an essential role as it must satisfy the id's urges without violating the moral principles of the superego or the existing reality. When the ego struggles to handle these internal stresses or faces major traumatic incidents, the individual may experience Deep Anxiety.

Within the scope of trauma, Freud classified a type of anxiety as neurotic anxiety. Neurotic anxiety emerges from an unconscious dread that the id's impulses will become unmanageable, leading the person to engage in behaviors that may lead to punishment or negative outcomes. In the case of traumatic childhood loss, painful memories are often pushed into the unconscious through the mechanism of repression. However, this repression does not completely eliminate the source of trauma within the individual. On the contrary, repressed trauma can actually give rise to hidden neurotic anxiety that continues to disrupt the stability of the ego into adulthood, causing the individual to frequently exhibit obsessive or abnormal behavior as a manifestation of unresolved psychological tension.

From a cognitive psychology standpoint, denial is viewed not just as an unconscious struggle between the id and ego, but also as a type of cognitive distortion and a way to evade traumatic events (Turiaco et al., 2025). Cognitive theory suggests that people employ denial to uphold the notion that the world is safe and orderly when confronted with traumatic events that challenge the very core of their reality. Moreover, contemporary psychoanalytic studies indicate that basic defense mechanisms like denial and impulsive actions are still viewed as typical during childhood. However, if these mechanisms continue to be overused into adulthood, as seen as Barry Allen, this may indicate the presence of psychological disorders and difficulties in regulating emotions (Tanzilli et al., 2021). Therefore, integrating Freud's theory with modern cognitive psychology approaches can provide a more comprehensive understanding of how Barry's childhood trauma influences his thinking and behavior in adulthood.

Childhood Trauma and the Defense Mechanism of Denial

Childhood trauma occurs when a child experiences a life-threatening or emotionally overwhelming situation that exceeds their capacity to cope psychologically. Recent clinical studies show that Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), such as the sudden and traumatic loss of a parent, have lasting neurobiological and psychological effects that permanently alter a person's stress response system and increase vulnerability to mental health disorders in later life (Klimesch et al., 2025). To safeguard the ego from complete breakdown stemming from trauma-induced pain and neurotic anxiety, the subconscious mind instinctively triggers defense mechanisms. A key defense mechanism in psychoanalysis is denial. Denial is seen as a mechanism for people to evade a reality that is hard to confront.

At first, denial was seen as a non-active way of avoiding emotions. However, Anna Freud (1936) expanded this concept through the idea of "denial in word and deed," that is, a form of denial manifested through actual behavior. Modern psychopathological research also supports this view by demonstrating that sudden traumatic loss can drive individuals to deny reality in more extreme ways, such as through dissociation or an obsessive urge to alter reality (Jafarpour et al., 2020). In superhero narratives, this form of active denial is often depicted literally. When trauma is not properly processed, individuals are driven to engage in irrational and high-risk actions to alter the reality that has already occurred. In *The Flash*, this condition is manifested through Barry Allen's time-travel to change his past.

Previous Studies

Numerous previous studies have thoroughly examined the use of psychoanalytic theory to analyze trauma and defensive mechanisms in fictional characters, demonstrating that film acts as an important medium for depicting human psychological processes. Ramadhani (2023) shows that childhood trauma significantly affects negative behaviors in adulthood as depicted in the film Cruella. Setyo & Nugroho (2024) point out ego defense mechanisms, such as denial, in the protagonist of No Longer Human as a reaction to profound guilt. Hardian (2025) found that defense mechanisms function as survival strategies within the harsh environment of The Hunger Games. Syarif & Purnomo (2025) examined Bruce Wayne's in The Batman, outlining how the ego attempts to cope with childhood trauma amidst ethical conflicts that compel him to take on his vigilante role.

Table 1. Previous Research on Trauma and Defense Mechanisms in *The Flash* (2023)

Researcher	Object	Focus	Finding	Relation to The Research
Ramadhani (2023)	*Cruella*	Childhood trauma → destructive behavior	Trauma shapes antisocial personality	Supporting this research by demonstrating that emotional trauma in childhood triggers extreme behavior in adulthood.
Setyo & Nugroho (2024)	*No Longer Human*	Ego defence patterns	Denial as passive avoidance	Expanding their framework by shifting the focus of analysis from passive emotional avoidance to active behavioral denial.
Hardian (2025)	*The Hunger Games*	Defense Mechanism	Survival through repression	Reinforces the fundamental concept that fictional characters use Psychological defense mechanisms to cope with extreme stress.
Syarif & Purnomo (2025)	*The Batman*	Sublimation of trauma	Trauma channeled Through vigilantism	Expanding their perspective by exploring the destructive manifestations of trauma through denial, rather than productive sublimation.

Moving beyond psychoanalytic literary criticism, modern psychological research has begun to highlight how individuals use imagination and "fantastic reality" to cope with severe trauma. The ability to immerse oneself in fantasy, such as the concept of time manipulation in science fiction, can serve as a psychological mechanism to reduce extreme stress and avoid feelings of loss (Rubinst ein et al., 2023). In superhero films, this condition is frequently shown straightforwardly with supernatural features and time travel, acting as cinematic symbols for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and dissociative coping strategies.

Despite prior studies offering a solid theoretical basis, a research gap persists that calls for additional exploration. Most prior studies still view denial as a form of passive emotional escape that occurs solely within a character's internal conflict. Therefore, this research seeks to broaden that perspective by analyzing the mechanisms of denial within the context of science fiction. This research views Barry Allen's manipulation of space and time in *The Flash* (2023) not merely as a superhero trope, but as an active and extreme form of behavioral denial. These actions demonstrate an irrational attempt to reject reality, which aligns with Freudian psychoanalytic concepts as well as modern cognitive psychology's critique of experiential avoidance.

METHOD

This research employs a qualitative descriptive design with a literary psychoanalytic approach. Qualitative methods were chosen because they provide a deeper understanding of the meanings underlying social and psychological phenomena (Creswell, 2014). In this research, the qualitative descriptive method is used to analyze the psychological issues experienced by Barry Allen in *The Flash* (2023), specifically regarding how childhood trauma gives rise to a defense mechanism in the form of behavioral denial or "denial in action." The primary approach used is Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory, which emphasizes the relationship between the Id, Ego, and Superego (Freud, 1923). Additionally, this research employs Anna Freud's (1936) concept of ego defense mechanisms to analyze the forms of behavioral denial exhibited by Barry Allen.

The data in this research consists of two types: primary data and secondary data. Primary data was obtained directly from *The Flash* (2023), directed by Andy Muschietti. Primary data focuses on cinematic visual elements, such as body language, facial expressions, and character actions, as well as dialogue that depicts Barry Allen's emotional and psychological state. Meanwhile, secondary data was obtained from various supporting sources, such as classic psychoanalytic texts by Sigmund and Anna Freud, modern psychology journals on trauma and avoidance of experience, as well as other relevant academic articles to support the analysis of primary data.

The research procedure was conducted systematically using non-participatory observation techniques through in-depth observation. The initial phase consisted of watching *The Flash* (2023) multiple times to grasp the storyline, visual symbols, and the emotional conditions of the characters. The second stage focused on pinpointing scenes and conversations that uncovered Barry Allen's childhood trauma stemming from his mother's death, along with the emotional responses that arose after that incident. Next, data were collected and classified based on psychoanalytic theory indicators, particularly the concept of "denial in words and actions" proposed by Anna Freud (1936). The analysis focused on forms of behavioral denial manifested through the manipulation of time within the film's science fiction elements. The final stage involved documenting the data in the form of screenshots and transcriptions of key dialogues as supporting evidence for the analysis.

The data analysis phase of this research employed the interactive analysis model developed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014). The analysis process began with data reduction, which

involved selecting and filtering visual scenes and dialogues directly related to unresolved trauma and the active denial mechanisms exhibited by Barry Allen. Subsequently, the data is presented in the form of structured narratives and dialogue excerpts to facilitate understanding of the character's psychological state. The next stage involves drawing conclusions by linking the analyzed data to psychoanalytic theory. To ensure data validity, this research employs theoretical triangulation. Visual data and dialogue are analyzed by comparing Freud's classical psychoanalytic concepts with modern psychological findings regarding trauma and defense mechanisms. Through this approach, conclusions regarding time manipulation as a form of psychological denial in *The Flash* (2023) can be explained in a more scientific and comprehensive manner.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

This Results and Discussion section outlines the main findings of the analysis of the *The Flash* (2023). Based on the established research questions and the theoretical framework developed from Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis, Anna Freud's defense mechanisms, and modern cognitive psychology, this analysis is divided into three main subsections. The first section will examine how the film depicts the childhood trauma and neurotic anxiety experienced by Barry Allen. The second section will explore in depth how this trauma triggers highly active and destructive defense mechanisms in the form of "denial in action". The third section discusses the destructive consequences of this denial and the emergence of an alter ego. This discussion will also be linked to finding from various previous studies to highlight the theoretical contributions of this research.

Before conducting an in-depth analysis, the primary data, comprising cinematic visual elements and dialogue excerpts that reflect Barry Allen's psychological state, were first reduced and categorized using an interactive analysis model. Table below presents a summary of the main findings based on psychoanalytic indicators, such as: childhood trauma, neurotic anxiety, and behavioral denial mechanisms.

Table 2. Classification of Dialogue Based on Freudian Psychoanalytic Indicators

No.	Character	Dialogue	Time Stamp	Psychoanalytical Indications
1.	Barry Allen	"I lost my mom to a tragedy, and I lost my dad to the failures of the justice system."	00.29.14	Childhood Trauma (A dual loss that creates an emotional void in one's psychological character).
2.	Bruce Wayne	"Barry, these scars we have, make us who we are. We're not meant to go back and fix them."	00.26.54	The Function of the Superego (The voice of reason and morality in coming to terms with traumatic reality).
3.	Barry Allen	"What if it's supposed to define me? Your tragedy made you a hero."	00.27.17	Neurotic Anxiety (The ego's rejection of rationality due to traumatic stress).
4.	Barry Allen	"I could fix things. I could save her. I could save both of them."	00.26.42	Active Denial (An obsession with twisting the facts rather than accepting the loss).
5.	Barry Allen	"This is just quick in, quick out, back to the present, like I was never even there. That's how I fix it."	00.30.28	Ego Rationalization (A logical attempt to justify and cover up denial).
6.	Past Bruce Wayne	"If a person is stupid enough to mess with time, what you eventually end up with is this. The multiverse."	01.04.18	Destructive Consequences (The tangible effects of extreme denial of reality).
7.	Past Barry Allen	"Well, guess what! It's too late! I am the Flash. And I can save everyone. Nobody dies!"	01.59.26	The Dominance of the Id (Uncontrolled primitive desires that reject the reality of the mother's death).

8.	Dark Flash	"It stops once I've fixed it! How do you like our endless paradox?"	02.04.20	The Peak of Denial (The physical manifestation of an endless cycle of traumatic denial).
9.	Barry Allen	"Barry, not every problem has a solution. Sometimes we just have to let go."	01.59.32	Acceptance (The breakdown of the denial mechanism and the restoration of ego balance).

Manifestations of Barry Allen's Childhood Trauma and Neurotic Anxiety

The childhood trauma experienced by the character Barry Allen stems from two tragic incidents that occurred simultaneously in his past. Referring to 1st data in Table 1, this is explicitly expressed by Barry through the dialogue:

Barry Allen: "*I lost my mom to a tragedy, and I lost my dad to the failures of the justice system"* (00.29.14).

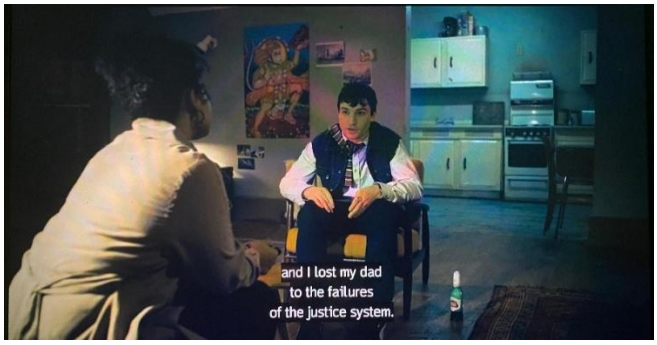


Figure 1. Barry Allen's expression of sadness as he discusses his family's tragedy.

The sudden death of his mother due to murder and the loss of his father due to baseless legal charges created immense pain within Barry's psychological makeup. Classical psychoanalytic theory posits that these deeply traumatic experiences do not simply disappear; instead, they are notably repressed into the unconscious mind. This repression process ultimately resulted in significant neurotic anxiety that continued in Barry into adulthood, indicating difficulties in the development of emotional regulation. This restless condition maintained his ego in constant upheaval, as he was eternally plagued by a sense of despair regarding a past he couldn't change.

Barry's ego's inability to process this childhood trauma is clearly evident when he argues with Bruce Wayne about the past. Bruce, who also has similar childhood trauma, tries to offer a rational perspective that represents the superego through his statements:

Bruce Wayne: *"Barry, these scars we have, make us who we are"* (00.26.54)

Bruce Wayne: "*We're not meant to go back and fix them"* (00.26:56)



Figure 2. Bruce Wayne's statement reflects the rational demands of the superego.

However, the part of Barry driven by a primal desire to regain his mother's affection vehemently rejected that reality. Instead, Barry refuted it by arguing,

Barry Allen: *"What if it's supposed to define me? Your tragedy made you a hero"* (00.27.17).

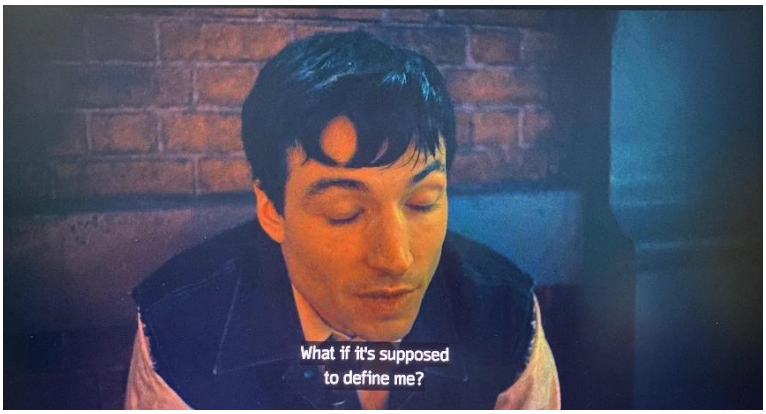


Figure 3. A remark by Barry Allen that suggests neurotic anxiety.

Barry's rejection of Bruce Wayne's advice indicates that his ego has failed to function as a rational mediator. As a result, his neurotic anxiety gradually began to take control of his consciousness and drive him toward extreme defense mechanisms.

The Manipulation of Space and Time as a Form of Active Denial

The defense mechanism of denial became evident when Barry realized he could run faster than the speed of light and manipulate time. Unlike most people who engage in passive denial by daydreaming or avoiding conversations, Barry instead planned structured physical actions. This aligns with Anna Freud's (1936) concept of "denial in word and deed" (behavioral denial) as well as modern cognitive theories regarding experiential avoidance. He disregarded Bruce's warnings about the butterfly effect and the fatal consequences of altering history by insisting:

Barry Allen: *"I could fix things. I could save her. I could save both of them"* (00.26.42).

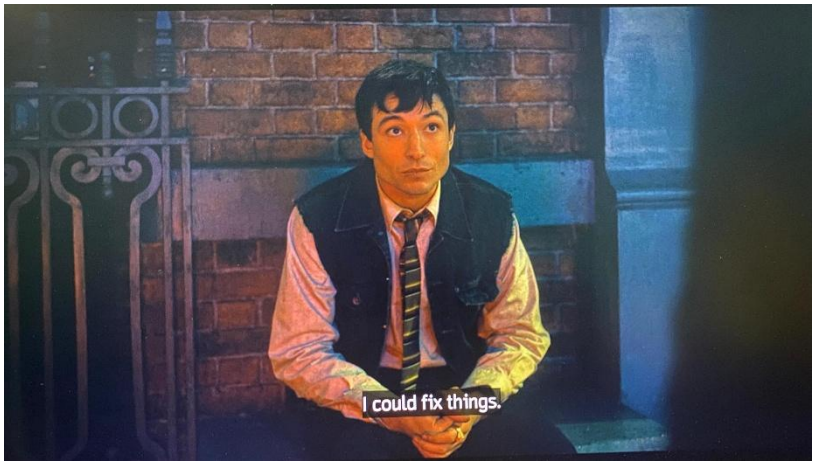


Figure 4. An expression of Barry Allen's obsession that represents active denial.

This statement confirms that Barry's denial has turned into a deep-seated obsession. He no longer merely denies reality in his mind; he is determined to distort the physical reality of the

universe to align with the deepest desires of his id. In an effort to justify his irrational actions, Barry's ego engages in a highly detailed rationalization of the events of the day his mother was murdered. He reduces the tragedy to a trivial matter involving a can of tomato sauce, as seen in his monologue:

> Barry Allen: *"If my mom doesn't forget the tomatoes in the first place, then he never leaves and she never dies"* (00.30.22)
>
> Barry Allen: "This is just quick in, quick out, back to the present, like I was never even there. That's how I fix it" (00.30.28).



Figure 5. Barry Allen's rationalization of his defense mechanism.



Figure 6. Active time manipulation (Chronobowl) as a manifestation of denial

This mindset indicates the presence of ego manipulation in the form of cognitive distortions used to avoid feelings of guilt resulting from violations of the laws of nature. This line of denial behavior indicates that the dismissal of behavior often includes flawed logical explanations, enabling the individual to believe their actions are warranted, even if they threaten reality. In this setting, the concept of time travel in science fiction serves as a cinematic emblem for a deep form of psychological escape.

The Destructive Consequences of Denial and the Emergence of the "Dark Flash"

However, this active denial did not come without consequences. Barry's obsessive denial ultimately triggered a major catastrophe that threatened the stability of the multiverse. Bruce Wayne from the past described this chaos

> Past Bruce Wayne*: "If a person is stupid enough to mess with time, what you eventually end up with is this. The multiverse... What it is, is a hot mess"* (01:04:18 - 01:04:20).

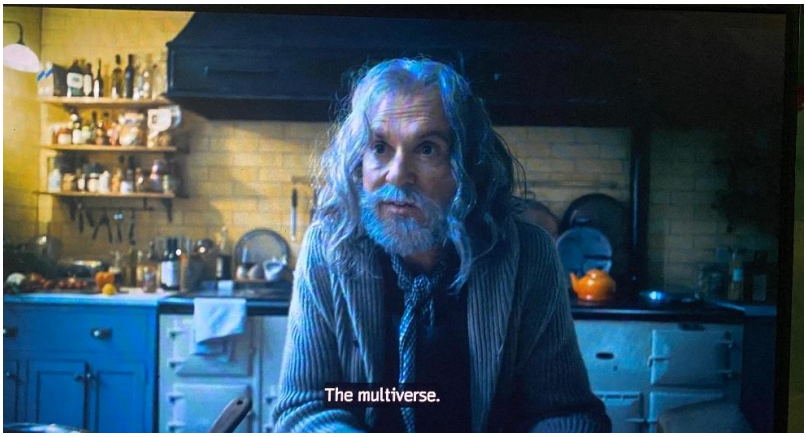


Figure 7. Bruce Wayne's warning about the destructive consequences of manipulating time.

Instead of admitting his mistake, this denial actually brings out Barry's dark side (the appearance of Barry Allen from the past and a creature known as the Dark Flash). Barry from the past symbolizes the pure and uncontrolled id, which stubbornly refuses to accept his mother's death:

> Past Barry Allen: *"Well, guess what! It's too late! I am the Flash. And I can save everyone. Nobody dies!"* (01.59.26).

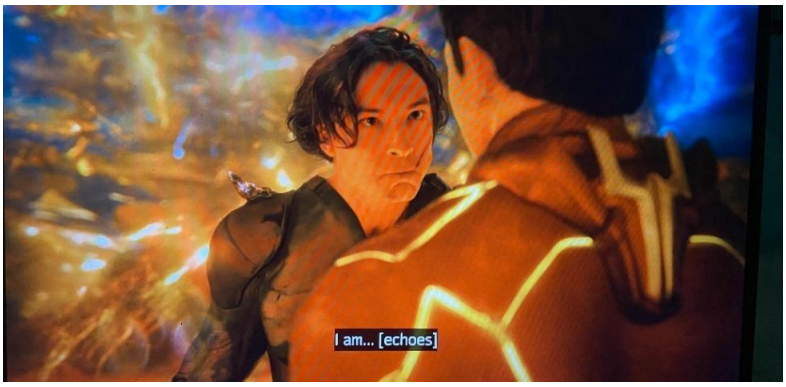


Figure 8. **The past Barry Allen, who embodies the absolute dominance of the Id.**

This dialogue highlights how overly protective defense mechanisms can diminish empathy and rational thinking, ultimately changing a person into a narcissistic and harmful individual.The rise of the Dark Flash serves as a powerful visual and narrative emblem for the emotional destruction caused by unaddressed denial.The Dark Flash symbolizes the future manifestation of Barry from the past, who has tried to change destiny millions of times:

> Dark Flash: *"It stops once I've fixed it! How do you like our endless paradox?"* (02.04.20).



Figure 9. The Dark Flash as an endless cycle of denial.

Dark Flash serves as a concrete example of Freud's concept of the repetition compulsion, the unconscious urge to repeat traumatic experiences in the hope of mastering them (Freud 1920). Barry's relentless efforts to change the past demonstrate how denial can turn into a self-perpetuating cycle, in which each failure triggers a new attempt rather than acceptance. Furthermore, the character of Dark Flash can be interpreted through Freud's concept of the return of the repressed, the reemergence of traumatic experiences and psychological drives that were previously repressed into the unconscious in a distorted and destructive form. In the context of the film, Dark Flash represents the pathological consequences of Barry's trauma, which was never truly resolved. When denial mechanisms are no longer able to maintain the ego's psychological stability, the internal conflicts that have long been repressed resurface in an extreme manner. Dark Flash's dark, broken, and terrifying appearance serves as a visual symbol of this psychological collapse, while also illustrating the dominance of the id's primitive drives, which take over the ego's ability to function rationally and adaptively.

The findings of this research align with the research by Ramadhani (2023) and Syarif and Purnomo (2025), which confirms that unresolved childhood trauma can influence a character's psychological development into adulthood. Ramadhani's analysis of the Cruella character demonstrates that childhood wounds develop into a destructive and antisocial personality, while Syarif and Purnomo's study explains that Bruce Wayne's trauma in The Batman is sublimated through acts of vigilantism. Just like these two characters, the trauma and grief experienced by Barry Allen serve as the primary drivers of his extreme actions.

However, this research differs from that of Setyo & Nugroho (2024), who view denial as an internal and passive defense mechanism to avoid guilt and emotional distress. In contrast, this research shows that Barry Allen's denial evolves into "denial in action", a rejection of reality that occurs not only internally but is also manifested through the manipulation of space-time, with significant multiversal consequences.

Ultimately, such psychological conflict can only be resolved when an individual stops avoiding the experience and begins to accept painful realities. This state is known as acceptance. Barry Allen came to this understanding when his cognitive distortions broke down after observing the devastation of multiple alternate realities and facing the Dark Flash, a being symbolizing perpetual denial of reality. From that experience, Barry understood that trauma and loss cannot be repaired or eliminated through time manipulation, but are instead aspects of life that must be embraced and incorporated into his being. That mental understanding was subsequently strengthened through the ensuing emotional conversation:

Barry Allen: *"Barry, not every problem has a solution. Sometimes we just have to let go"* (01.59.32).

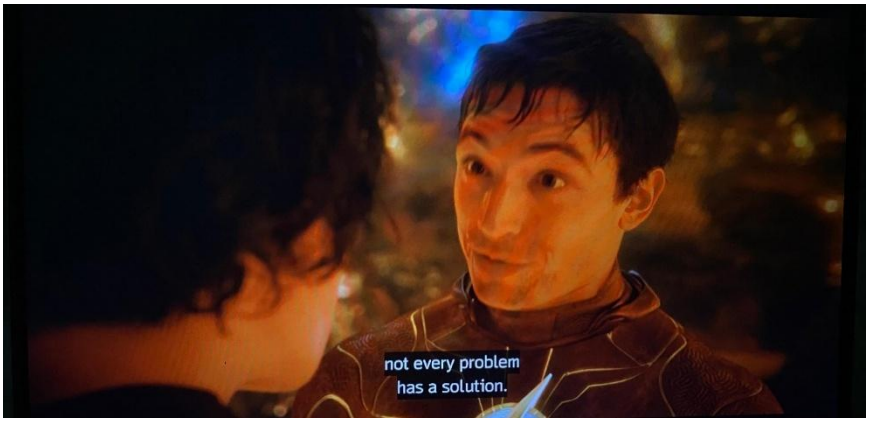


Figure 10. Barry Allen's realization that his defense mechanisms have broken down.

The decision to "let go" of his mother marked the collapse of the defense mechanisms that had long protected his ego. This realization restored the balance between the id and the superego, alleviated neurotic anxiety, and proved that the only true way to heal childhood trauma is to consciously accept the pain of reality itself. Barry's journey represents a psychological trajectory from childhood trauma through pathological denial to ultimately reaching the stage of acceptance. This transformation not only affirms psychoanalytic principles regarding the impact of trauma and defense mechanisms but also expands their meaning through the imaginative exploration offered by the science fiction narrative.

Limitation of The Research

Although this research identified significant forms of behavioral denial in superhero narratives, there are several limitations that should be noted. First, the qualitative descriptive approach in literary psychoanalysis involves a high degree of subjectivity, as the interpretation of dialogue and visual metaphors relies heavily on the researcher's perspective in understanding psychoanalytic theory. Second, this research has not employed inter-researcher validation (inter-rater reliability), so the analysis results have not been independently verified by other researchers in the fields of psychology or literature. This situation has the potential to introduce interpretive bias. Third, this research focuses only on a single cinematic text, namely the film The Flash. Therefore, the findings regarding the manipulation of time as a metaphor for "denial in action" cannot yet be generalized to all science fiction films or superhero films in general.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the analysis and discussion, this research concludes that the childhood trauma experienced by Barry Allen due to his mother's tragic death triggered the emergence of deep neurotic anxiety. This condition arises when the Ego is unable to balance the Id's drive to restore past happiness with the Superego's demand to accept the reality of his mother's death. To protect his fragile psychological state, Barry employs a defense mechanism known as denial in action. The primary contribution of this research lies in explaining how the classical psychoanalytic concept of active denial is expanded within the framework of modern science fiction. The denial experienced by Barry is not merely a passive emotional escape but is manifested through active actions involving the manipulation of space and time. Actions that initially appear as minor changes

eventually develop into a destructive paradox marked by the emergence of the Dark Flash and the instability of the multiverse. Thus, time travel in *The Flash* (2023) functions as a cinematic metaphor for the dangers of avoiding unresolved experiences and trauma.

In addition to making a theoretical contribution to the study of literary psychoanalysis, this research also has practical benefits as a psychoeducational tool to raise public awareness of the impact of unresolved trauma. This research demonstrates that escapism or the desire to continually flee from reality, can develop into psychologically destructive behavior, even when such actions appear to be heroic. Therefore, this research underscores the importance of the process of acceptance in confronting traumatic experiences. For future research, it is recommended to conduct a comparative psychological analysis of other characters within the same cinematic universe, for example, by comparing the destructive denial mechanisms employed by Barry Allen with the sublimation mechanisms utilized by Bruce Wayne in addressing their past traumas. Additionally, future research could expand the study by utilizing Carl Jung's analytical psychology theory, particularly the concepts of the Shadow and the Persona, to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of the destructive alter-ego and psychological paradoxes in modern superhero characters.

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