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CASSANDRA WEBB'S SEARCH FOR IDENTITY AND DEFENSE MECHANISMS IN MADAME WEB (2024) THROUGH FREUD'S PSYCHOANALYTIC THEORY

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji pencarian jati diri Cassandra Webb dan mekanisme pertahanan diri yang ia gunakan dalam film *Madame Web* (2024) melalui teori psikoanalisis Sigmund Freud. Penelitian ini berfokus pada struktur Id, Ego, dan Superego, untuk mengkaji bagaimana konflik dan kecemasan tidak sadar Cassandra membentuk perilakunya ketika ia berjuang menyesuaikan diri dengan kemampuan cenayang yang tiba-tiba dimilikinya serta tanggung jawab yang menyertainya. Dengan menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif, penelitian ini mengumpulkan data dari adegan-adegan terpilih, dialog, dan interaksi antar tokoh yang memperlihatkan ketegangan batin dan strategi coping Cassandra. Data tersebut kemudian diinterpretasikan dengan menggunakan konsep struktur kepribadian dan mekanisme pertahanan diri Freud. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pembentukan identitas Cassandra sangat terkait dengan interaksi dinamis antara dorongan naluriah id, pertimbangan realistik ego, dan tuntutan moral superego. Sepanjang film, ia sering menggunakan mekanisme pertahanan seperti penyangkalan (*denial*), rasionalisasi (*rationalization*), proyeksi (*projection*) untuk menghadapi rasa takut, rasa bersalah, dan beban tanggung jawab yang berlebihan. Mekanisme-mekanisme ini sekaligus melindungi dan menunda pertumbuhan psikologisnya sampai ia secara bertahap mengintegrasikan kekuatannya ke dalam jati diri yang lebih koheren. Secara keseluruhan, penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa kerangka psikoanalisis Freud tetap efektif untuk menjelaskan kedalaman psikologis tokoh pahlawan super kontemporer dan menyoroti bagaimana *Madame Web* (2024) menggambarkan konflik batin dan negosiasi identitas melampaui narasi permukaannya.

Kata kunci: pencarian jati diri, mekanisme pertahanan diri, psikoanalisis

Abstract

This research studies Cassandra Webb's search for identity and the defense mechanisms she employs in the film *Madame Web* (2024) through Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory. Focusing on the structure of the id, ego, and superego, the research examines how Cassandra's unconscious conflict and anxieties shape her behaviour as she struggles to adapt to her sudden clairvoyant abilities and the responsibilities attached to them. Using a qualitative descriptive method, the study collects data from selected scenes, dialogues, and character interactions that reveal Cassandra's internal tension and coping strategies. These data are then interpreted using Freud's concepts of personality structure and defense mechanisms. The findings show that Cassandra's identity formation is closely tied to the dynamic interaction between her id's instinctual impulses, her ego's reality-based considerations, and

her superego's moral demands. Throughout the film, she frequently relies on defense mechanisms such as denial, rationalization, and projection to manage fear, guilt, and overwhelming responsibility. These mechanisms both protect and delay her psychological growth until she gradually integrates her powers into a more coherent sense of self. Overall, the study demonstrates that Freud's psychoanalytic framework remains effective for explaining the psychological depth of contemporary superhero characters and highlights how *Madame Web (2024)* portrays inner conflict and identity negotiation beyond its surface-level narrative.

Keywords: identity search, defense mechanisms, psychoanalysis

1. Introduction

Literature can be understood as written or oral texts that artistically express human experiences, thoughts, and emotions through imaginative and carefully crafted language (Britannica, 2025). Through its themes, characters, and narrative structures, literature often reflects the values, conflicts, and psychological conditions of the society in which it is produced. In contemporary contexts, film is often regarded as a form of literary work because it combines visual and auditory elements to convey messages and influence audiences (Supriarza, 2020). By presenting characters, conflicts, and settings in visual and individual struggles, allowing viewers to engage more deeply with complex emotional and psychological experiences.

Madame Web (2024) offers such a narrative by centering on *Madame Web*, a paramedic whose life changes dramatically after she unexpectedly acquires supernatural clairvoyant abilities. Alongside external dangers, Cassandra faces profound internal struggles as she attempts to adjust to her new powers and the responsibilities they impose. The film repeatedly highlights her anxiety, confusion, and hesitation, suggesting that her journey is not only physical and heroic but also deeply psychological. These features make *Madame Web* a compelling object of study for psychoanalytic analysis.

This research approaches Cassandra Webb's character through Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory, focusing on the dynamic interaction among the id, ego, and superego as well as the ego's use of defense mechanisms. Freud conceptualizes personality as structured into three interacting systems: the id, which contains instinctual drives; the ego, which operates according to the reality principle; and the superego, which internalizes moral norms and ideals. When these systems come into conflict, individuals often experience anxiety and unconsciously employ defense mechanisms such as denial and rationalization to protect the ego from psychological distress.

In *Madame Web*, Cassandra's reluctance to accept her role as a protector and her attempts to distance herself from the three teenage girls she repeatedly saves reveal ongoing internal negotiations between her instinctive fears, moral obligations, and realistic

considerations. Her verbal rejections of responsibility and her seemingly logical justifications for questionable decisions indicate the operation of denial and rationalization as central defense mechanisms. Examining these patterns provides insight into how Cassandra's identity is formed, disrupted, and gradually reconstructed throughout the film.

Despite a growing body of scholarship on psychoanalysis in film, *Madame Web* (2024) has received little academic attention, particularly from a Freudian perspective. Previous studies have shown that applying psychoanalytic concepts to cinematic characters can reveal the unconscious motives and inner conflicts that shape their development, especially in genres often dismissed as mere entertainment, such as superhero films. However, there remains a gap in research that specifically explores how a contemporary superhero narrative like *Madame Web* dramatizes identity struggles and defense mechanisms through its protagonist.

In summary, this study seeks to fill the gap in psychoanalytic film research by focusing specifically on Cassandra Webb's inner conflict and identity formation in *Madame Web* (2024), a contemporary superhero film that has received little academic attention from a Freudian perspective. By examining how her id, ego, and superego interact and how denial and rationalization emerge as her main defense mechanisms, the research aims to provide a deeper understanding of the psychological process behind her transformation from a reluctant paramedic into a protector. At the same time, the study intends to demonstrate that Freud's psychoanalytic theory remains relevant for analyzing modern popular cinema, particularly in revealing how seemingly entertaining narratives also stage complex struggles over identity, responsibility, and self-acceptance.

To address this gap, the present study investigates Cassandra Webb's search for identity and her use of defense mechanisms in *Madame Web* (2024) through Freud's psychoanalytic framework. The research focuses on two main questions:

- (1) What defense mechanisms does Cassandra Webb use to cope with her anxiety during her search for identity?
- (2) How do Cassandra Webb's id, ego, and superego structures contribute to the emergence of these defense mechanisms in the film?

By answering these questions, the study aims to deepen the understanding of Cassandra's psychological complexity and to demonstrate the continuing relevance of Freudian theory for analyzing character construction in contemporary popular cinema.

2. Literature Review

A film is an audiovisual work that presents a story through moving images and sound, allowing messages and meanings to be communicated to the audience. As a literary form projected through image, sound, and motion, film relies on narrative structure--plot, character, setting, and theme--to build a coherent and meaningful experience. Characters, in particular, play a central role in expressing psychological and social issues because their actions, emotions, and conflicts can mirror the struggles of real individuals in society.

Madame Web (2024) is especially relevant for character-based analysis because it foregrounds the inner conflict of Cassandra Webb as she confronts supernatural abilities and increasing moral responsibility. The intense and uncanny situations she faces bring her instinctive drives, moral values, and reality-based considerations into constant tension, making the film suitable for a psychoanalytic reading.

Studies on contemporary superhero films also show that these narratives often negotiate identity and responsibility rather than merely presenting spectacular action (Nurhayati and Ramadhan, 2022). An example is examining how superheroes in the *Marvel Cinematic Universe* construct social and gender identities through their roles and relationships with others. Their findings support the present study's view that *Madame Web (2024)* likewise stages a complex process of identity negotiation for its protagonist, making it suitable for psychoanalytic analysis.

Psychoanalysis, developed by Sigmund Freud, is a theoretical and methodological framework for understanding the dynamics of the human unconscious. Freud proposed that personality consists of three interrelated systems: the id, the ego, and the superego, which interact to shape thought, feeling, and behaviour (Hall, 1954). The id is the most primitive part of the psyche, operating on the pleasure principle and seeking immediate gratification of instinctual desires to reduce tension.

Recent work by Rahmadhani and Jaya (2024) applies Freud's structural model of psyche to the main character of *X-Men: Dark Phoenix*, showing how id, ego, and superego interact to shape a superhero's destructive impulses and moral dilemmas. Their analysis demonstrates that mapping cinematic scenes onto the three psychic structures can clarify how inner conflicts become visible through a character's actions, a strategy that is also used in this study of Cassandra Webb.

The ego emerges to mediate between the id's impulsive demands and the constraints of external reality, working according to the reality principle to choose feasible and socially acceptable actions. The superego develops from internalized parental, cultural, and social

norms, functioning as the moral component of personality that produces guilt when behaviour violates ethical standards and offers an ego ideal as a model of how one “should” be. When the balance among the id, ego, and superego is disturbed, individuals may experience anxiety, inner conflict, and difficulty making decisions.

Within Freud’s framework, ego defense mechanisms are unconscious strategies used by the ego to reduce anxiety arising from conflicts between the id, ego, and superego. These mechanisms protect psychological stability by distorting or managing reality in ways that make distressing thoughts and feelings more bearable. Among the many defense mechanisms identified in psychoanalytic theory, this study focuses on denial and rationalization, which are most clearly illustrated in Cassandra Webb’s behaviour.

Recent studies also apply Freud’s defense mechanisms to contemporary film characters. (Rezeki, 2023) identifies various forms of anxiety and ego defenses used by the main character in *The Invisible Man (2020)*, including rationalization, denial, fantasy, and reaction formation, to cope with constant terror and psychological pressure. These findings support the present study’s focus on denial and rationalization as key strategies through which a film protagonist manages fear and guilt.

Denial is a defense mechanism identified in psychoanalytic theory in which individuals unconsciously reject or minimize aspects of reality that are too painful or threatening to accept. Experimental research by Otgaar et al. (2017) shows that denial can even affect a person’s awareness of their own actions, as people may later fail to recognize that they previously denied certain facts.

Denial occurs when an individual unconsciously rejects or minimizes aspects of reality that are too painful or threatening to accept. Research on denial has shown that it can shape awareness of one’s own actions, as people may later fail to recognize that they previously denied certain facts. Rationalization, by contrast, involves creating seemingly logical and acceptable explanations to justify behaviours, thoughts, or feelings that are actually driven by less acceptable motives or fears. While rationalization reduces guilt and preserves self-image, it can also obscure underlying conflicts and delay genuine psychological growth.

Previous studies on psychoanalysis in film typically explore how cinematic characters embody deep inner conflicts and unconscious motivations. Scholars have applied Freudian concepts to reveal how narrative events trigger anxiety, how defense mechanisms operate, and how characters negotiate identity under pressure. However, there is still limited research that applies Freud’s structural model and defense mechanisms specifically to *Madame Web (2024)* and to Cassandra Webb’s journey of identity formation. This study, therefore, builds on earlier

psychoanalytic film research while filling a gap by examining denial and rationalization in relation to the interplay of id, ego, and superego in a contemporary superhero narrative.

Previous studies on psychoanalysis in film show that Freud's concepts can reveal how cinematic characters experience anxiety, inner conflict, and gradual psychological change under pressure. Several researchers have examined how defense mechanisms operate in narratives by identifying moments when characters distort or reinterpret reality to protect themselves from guilt and fear. These studies demonstrate that mechanisms such as denial and rationalization often appear when protagonists are confronted with life-altering decisions, moral dilemmas, or traumatic events, and that such mechanisms play a central role in shaping how the audience understands their motivations and development.

For instance, Thorn (2015) analyzes how Pi Patel's struggle in *Life of Pi* reflects the tension between id, ego, and superego, showing that psychoanalytic concepts can reveal the deep inner conflicts behind a character's survival journey. Another relevant study was conducted by Wardhani and Saptanto (2023), who analyzed the id, ego, and superego in the main character of *Raya and the Last Dragon*. Their research shows how Freud's structural model can be used to explain a protagonist's moral dilemmas and inner conflicts in an animated fantasy film, indicating that psychoanalytic theory remains useful for understanding character development in contemporary popular movies.

However, there is still limited research that applies Freud's structural model of the id, ego, and superego together with defense mechanisms specifically to *Madame Web* (2024) and to Cassandra Webb's journey of identity formation. While earlier psychoanalytic film analyses have focused on other superhero figures and different types of inner conflict, they have not examined how contemporary heroines like Cassandra negotiates her new powers, moral obligations, and desire for a normal life through denial and rationalization. By combining Freud's personality structure and defense mechanisms, the present study therefore builds on previous psychoanalytic film research while filling a gap by analysing how Cassandra's identity search in *Madame Web* (2024) is constructed through the dynamic interplay of unconscious drives, moral demands, and ego defenses.

3. Research Method

This study uses a descriptive qualitative method because the film *Madame Web* (2024) and Cassandra Webb's psychological journey are better understood through non-numerical, descriptive data. A qualitative approach is suitable for exploring processes and patterns that cannot be reduced to numerical variables (Creswell, 2014). A qualitative approach makes it

possible to pay close attention to meanings, emotions, and inner conflicts that appear in scenes, dialogues, and character interactions, especially when the focus is on identity formation and defense mechanisms. In this kind of research, the data are naturally verbal and visual rather than statistical, so they need to be interpreted in context rather than measured in numbers.

The main data of this research comes entirely from the film *Madame Web* (2024), with a specific focus on Cassandra Webb as the central character. The film was watched several times to follow the development of Cassandra's character from the beginning to the end of the story, with special attention to moments that show her anxiety, hesitation, and shifting sense of responsibility. During these viewings, notes were taken on scenes, lines of dialogue, and expressions that suggested the operation of the id, ego, and superego, as well as indications of denial and rationalization. Additional data in the form of screen shots were also collected to help identify specific moments that clearly illustrate her inner conflict and changes in her self-perception.

After the data were collected, the scenes were organized into categories based on Freud's psychoanalytic concepts. First, Cassandra's actions, thoughts, and reactions were identified as expressions of the id (instinctive desire and fears), the ego (realistic decision making), or the superego (moral judgments and obligations). Second, scenes that clearly showed Cassandra rejecting or minimizing painful realities were grouped as examples of denial, while scenes in which she provided seemingly logical reasons to soften guilt or discomfort were treated as instances of rationalization.

The analysis was conducted by describing each selected scene in detail and then interpreting how the id, ego, and superego interact in that moment and why denial or rationalization appears as Cassandra's way of coping. By comparing several key scenes across the film, the study traces patterns in Cassandra's psychological responses and how these patterns change as she gradually accepts her role as a protector. In the final step, the findings from this analysis were related to the two research questions in the introduction in order to explain how Freud's psychoanalytic theory helps clarify Cassandra Webb's search for identity and the defense mechanisms she relies on throughout the narrative.

4. Result and Discussion

4.1. Cassandra Webb's defense mechanisms

The analysis shows that Cassandra Webb repeatedly relies on two defense mechanisms, denial and rationalization, to cope with anxiety during her search for identity. These mechanisms appear especially in moments when her new power and the danger

surrounding her feel too overwhelming, and when accepting reality would force her to change her self-image.

Cassandra's first denial comes after the bridge accident, when she experiences a disturbing sense of "repetition" but quickly downplays the incident in front of Ben Parker.



Figure 4.1.1 shows Cassandra right after the bridge accident, when she has just experienced a disturbing sense of "repetition".

Although she has just survived a life-threatening event and glimpsed something uncanny, she insists that she is fine and merely wants to go home and watch television, as if nothing unusual has happened.

A similar pattern occurs at Mary's baby shower: after another strange vision, she brushes off Ben's concern by calling it only a "weird sense of deja vu."



Figure 4.1.2 captures Cassandra at Mary's baby shower after she receives another strange vision.

In both scenes, denial allows Cassandra to temporarily avoid the frightening implication that her life is changing in ways she cannot fully control. At this point, Cassandra realizes something is odd about her experiences, as she feels it is happening again. However, she chooses to call it “deja vu” and says she is fine.

Cassandra's denial is also visible in an earlier conversation with Mary before the baby shower. When Mary notices her distraction and asks, “You’ve been acting strange lately. Is something wrong?” Cassandra quickly answers, “I’m just tired. Night shifts are killing me, that’s all.” By attributing her behaviour only to work fatigue, she refuses to acknowledge the frightening visions she has already experienced. This everyday excuse allows the ego to hide the true source of anxiety, her emerging clairvoyance from both others and herself, illustrating denial as an unconscious refusal to accept a threatening reality.

Rationalization appears most strongly after Cassandra fails to save her co-worker, O’Neil.



Figure 4.1.3 shows Cassandra back in her apartment after failing to save her co-worker, O’Neil.

Back in the apartment, burdened by guilt, she hears a line on television about changing the future and responds, “You can’t change the future,” turning her failure into a seemingly logical statement about destiny. By framing the events as something inevitable, she protects herself from confronting the possibility that her inexperience or hesitation

contributed to O’Neil’s death. Later, when she decides to leave Julia, Anya, and Mattie to travel to Peru, she again rationalizes her choice as “the only way” to discover the truth and protect them, even though it also serves her desire to escape overwhelming pressures.



Figure 4.1.4 depicts the moment when Cassandra decides to leave Julia, Anya, and Mattie to travel to Peru.

These examples suggest that denial and rationalization work together to stabilize Cassandra’s ego. Denial helps her postpone full recognition of her role as a protector, while rationalization provides comforting explanations that make her decisions feel reasonable, even when they are driven by fear. At the same time, both mechanisms slow down her acceptance of a new identity and delay her psychological growth.

Rationalization becomes even more apparent after O’Neil’s death. Alone in her apartment, Cassandra watches a television program that discusses changing the future and responds, “You can’t change the future,” turning her failure into a seemingly objective statement about destiny. By treating the accident as something inevitable, the ego creates a logical explanation that protects her from fully accepting the possibility that her hesitation or confusion contributed to her colleague’s death.

A similar pattern occurs when Cassandra decides to leave Julia, Anya, and Mattie with Ben before travelling to Peru. She tells him, “If I stay here, he’ll keep coming for us. But if I find out what my mother started, I can end this for good.” On the surface, this justification frames her departure as a strategic and selfless act, but it also conceals her wish to gain distance from constant attacks and overwhelming responsibility. By presenting her

choice as the “only way” to protect the girls, the ego again uses rationalization to transform an anxiety-driven desire to escape into a reasonable and morally acceptable decision.

Taken together, these scenes indicate that denial and rationalization function as Cassandra’s main strategies for managing anxiety during her search for identity. Denial allows her to postpone fully acknowledging the extent of her powers and responsibilities, while rationalization provides comforting explanations that make her choices appear reasonable even when they are driven by fear. In Freud’s terms, both mechanisms help the ego defend itself from the pressure of disturbing thoughts and feelings, yet they also slow down Cassandra’s psychological growth by keeping her attached to an earlier self-image as an ordinary paramedic. This shows that her identity formation in *Madame Web* (2024) is not a smooth progression, but a process in which ego defenses both protect and limit her as she moves toward accepting a new role.

4.2. Id, Ego, and Superego in Cassandra’s Denial and Rationalization

Cassandra’s denial is closely connected to the tension between her id, ego, and superego. After she rescues the three girls by taxi, Julia thanks her for protecting them, but Cassandra immediately rejects the label: “No, no, no, that’s not what’s happening here, I’m not protecting you.”



Figure 4.2.1 illustrates Cassandra’s immediate reaction after Julia thanks her for protecting the girls in the taxi scene.

On the level of the id, this reaction is driven by fear of permanent responsibility, fear of failure, and fear that her life will be changed forever. The superego, however, has already recognized that saving the girls is the “right thing,” pushing her to accept the moral reality

of her actions. Caught between these forces, the ego chooses denial, rejecting the identity of “protector” to preserve her previous self-image as an ordinary person who was accidentally dragged into danger.

Cassandra’s inner conflict is further highlighted when Ben urges her to accept her role after several attacks by Ezekiel. When Ben says, “They need you, Cassie. You’re the only one who can stop him,” she answers, “I didn’t ask for any of this. I’m just a paramedic, not some hero.” In this exchange. The id expresses a strong desire to avoid danger and return to an ordinary life, while the superego, represented by Ben’s reminder, insists on her moral duty to protect the girls. The ego responds by insisting on her old identity as “just a paramedic,” showing how it resists a new self-definition to reduce anxiety.

A similar dynamic appears when Cassandra hides the girls in a remote forest and decides to leave them “to find a way out,” promising that she will come back.



Figure 4.2.2 shows Cassandra hiding the girls in the remote forest and deciding to leave them behind “to find a way out”, while promising that she will return.

The id longs to escape the exhausting and frightening burden of being hunted by Ezekiel while also acting as a caretaker for the teenagers. The superhero insists that she remains responsible for their safety, generating a sense of duty that makes leaving them behind morally problematic. Again, the ego turns to denial, minimizing the ongoing danger and convincing itself that temporarily abandoning the girls is a responsible choice. In both scenes, denial becomes a compromise that allows Cassandra to act on her fears without fully admitting that she is avoiding her protective role.

Rationalization also emerges from conflicts among the id, ego, and superego, but here the ego focuses on rebuilding Cassandra's self-image after moments of failure or doubt. After O'Neil's death, Cassandra experiences intense sadness, fear, and guilt emotions rooted in the id's desire to avoid pain and the superego's demands that she take responsibility for a colleague she could not save.



Figure 4.2.3 presents Cassandra after O'Neil's death, when she is alone and visibly shaken by the loss.

To manage this tension, the ego constructs a rational explanation: the future simply cannot be changed. By telling herself this, Cassandra can still see herself as a caring and competent person while lowering the sense of personal blame.

When Cassandra decides to go to Peru, the same patterns repeat.



Figure 4.2.4 portrays Cassandra's decision to leave the girls with Ben and travel to Peru on her own.

The id wants relief from constant attacks and from the heavy task of watching over Julia, Anya, and Mattie, while the superego reminds her that the girls are depending on her. The ego resolves this conflict through rationalization, insisting that leaving them with Ben is the only realistic way to uncover the truth and ultimately protect them. Although there is genuine concern for the girls in this decision, the rationalization also hides her wish to distance herself, at least temporarily, from direct responsibility.

Across these examples, rationalization functions as a narrative marker of Cassandra's effort to narrate her life in a way that still feels coherent and morally acceptable. By giving her actions reasonable justifications, it helps her move forward without being paralyzed by guilt, yet it also reveals how deeply her ego struggles to balance fear, obligations, and reality.

Taken together, the patterns of denial and rationalization show that Cassandra's search for identity is not a straightforward journey from weakness to strength, but a process filled with hesitation, avoidance, and gradual self-confrontation. At first, her defenses keep tied to an older identity as a "normal" paramedic who wants a simple life, even as her visions and heroic actions contradict that image. Over time, repeated crises force her to recognize that her powers and responsibilities cannot be explained away or denied forever.

As the narrative progresses, Cassandra's ego slowly integrates the demands of the id and superego instead of only defending against them. She begins to accept that protecting the girls is not an accident, but part of who she is becoming, and her choices reflect a greater willingness to face danger consciously rather than hide behind denial or comfortable explanations. In this way, the film illustrates how identity can be reshaped through inner conflict: the clash between instinct, morality, and reality, mediated by defense mechanisms, ultimately pushes Cassandra toward a more stable and mature sense of self.

Later, in the final confrontation, Cassandra tells the girls, "I'm here now, and I'm not running anymore," indicating a shift in the balance between the three structures. The id's wish to escape and the superego's moral demands are no longer in sharp opposition, because the ego now recognizes that facing Ezekiel is both necessary and consistent with her developing sense of responsibility. This moment suggests that Cassandra's ego has moved from merely defending against conflict to integrating instinct, morality, and reality, marking an important step in her identity formation as a protector.

Overall, the interaction between Cassandra's id, ego, and superego explains why denial and rationalization repeatedly appear at critical moments in the film. Her id pushes her to escape danger and heavy responsibility, while her superego insists that she acknowledge her moral duty to protect the girls, leaving the ego to negotiate between these conflicting demands. At first, the ego relies heavily on denial and rationalization to reduce anxiety and preserve its old self-image, but as the narrative progresses, it begins to integrate the claims of instinct, morality, and reality more consciously. In this way, Cassandra's gradual acceptance of her identity as a protector can be seen as the outcome of an inner process in which the ego moves from merely defending itself to actively reshaping her sense of who she is.

5. Conclusion

The study set out to examine Cassandra Webb's search for identity and the defense mechanisms she uses in *Madame Web* (2024) through Freud's psychoanalytic theory. The analysis shows that Cassandra consistently relies on two main defense mechanisms, denial and rationalization, to manage the anxiety that arises from her sudden clairvoyant abilities and the heavy responsibility of protecting Julia, Anya, and Mattie. Through denial, she minimizes or rejects disturbing realities, such as the significance of her visions or her role as a protector, while rationalization provides seemingly logical explanations that soften guilt and help her maintain a coherent self-image after moments of failure or doubt.

The findings also reveal that these mechanisms are deeply connected to the interaction between Cassandra's id, ego, and superego. Her fear of permanent responsibility and desire to escape danger stem from the id, her moral awareness of what is "right" reflects the superego, and her ego navigates between them by using denial and rationalization as coping strategies. Over the course of the film, repeated crises force the ego to move beyond mere defense and begin integrating the demands of instinct, morality, and reality, leading Cassandra to gradually accept her identity as a protector.

Overall, the study demonstrates that Freud's psychoanalytic framework remains useful for understanding the psychological depth of contemporary superhero characters. *Madame Web* not only presents spectacular action but also stages a complex process of identity formation, in which inner conflict and defense mechanisms shape how the protagonist comes to terms with who she is and what she is responsible for. These findings also suggest that Cassandra's transformation is shaped directly by the continuous pressures and conflicts she

faces throughout the film, showing that her growth as a character emerges from the way she negotiates between personal desire, moral duty, and psychological defense.

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