

TRAUMA AND THE MEANING OF LIFE FOR THE CHARACTER AKAZA IN THE MOVIE DEMON SLAYER: INFINITY CASTLE

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the trauma and search for meaning in the life of the character Akaza in the film “Demon Slayer: Infinity Castle” through the perspective of Viktor E. Frankl’s existential psychology. The method used is descriptive-interpretative qualitative analysis of film scenes and a review of literature related to logotherapy, trauma, and character dynamics. The results show that the recurring trauma experienced by Akaza forms existential suffering that plunges him into meaninglessness and pseudo-meaning in the form of an obsession with power. However, flashbacks to significant figures bring back the values of love and responsibility, which encourage the choice of a positive existential attitude until self-transcendence is achieved. This study expands the application of logotherapy to antagonistic characters and shows that popular media can represent existential dynamics in a complex manner. The findings contribute to the development of character psychology studies in films and reinforce the potential of fictional narratives as a medium for psychological and reflective education.

INTRODUCTION

Film, as a product of popular culture, not only functions as visual entertainment but also as a medium for representing complex human experiences, including psychological trauma, inner conflict, and the search for meaning in life. In literary and film studies, audiovisual works are often understood as narrative texts that reflect the social and psychological realities of society, even though they are framed through creative imagination (Ahmadi, 2020). Films also play an important role in reflecting and critiquing social and humanitarian phenomena developing in society (Meilani & Ahmadi, 2025). Therefore, film analysis is not only relevant in aesthetic studies but also in psychological approaches that seek to understand the inner dynamics of characters.

One popular work that presents the psychological complexity of its characters is the Japanese animated film “Demon Slayer: Infinity Castle,” an adaptation of the manga “Kimetsu no Yaiba” by Koyoharu Gotouge. This film does not merely present the conflict between the protagonist and antagonist in a black-and-white moral framework, but rather shows characters who are built through traumatic backgrounds, value conflicts, and struggles with the meaning of life. The antagonists in this film are not only positioned as evil figures, but also as individuals who carry deep psychological wounds and a history of suffering that shapes their existential choices.

In the context of psychology, trauma is understood as a psychological experience that has the potential to disrupt a person's stability and functioning (Imamah & Ahmadi, 2025). Unresolved trauma can manifest itself in the form of manipulative behavior, aggression, extreme emotions, and ongoing interpersonal conflict (Nabila & Ernawati, 2025). The character Akaza, formerly known as "Hakuji" before turning into a demon, represents this narrative. He experienced a series of traumatic events in the form of losing his father, failing to protect his loved ones, and the collapse of his identity as a human being. His transformation into a demon not only marked a physical change but also a shift in values and the orientation of the meaning of life.

This condition makes Akaza relevant to analyze through the perspective of existential psychology, particularly Viktor E. Frankl's theory of logotherapy. In logotherapy, humans are seen as beings driven primarily by the will to meaning, not merely by the pursuit of pleasure or power (Frankl, 2006). Frankl asserts that even in conditions of extreme suffering, such as loss, guilt, and limitations, humans still have the potential to find meaning in life through the choices they make (Frankl, 2014). The concept of self-transcendence is key to understanding how individuals can transcend personal suffering for the sake of higher values.

A number of studies in Indonesia have examined the meaning of life and logotherapy in the context of real people. Utami & Setiawati (2018) show that the experience of migrating can give rise to a meaning of life through adaptation to new conditions. Fitriana & Hadjam (2016) found that logotherapy intervention significantly reduced depression levels in women who were victims of domestic violence. Alqasimi & Wahyudi (2025) also proved the effectiveness of logotherapy in increasing an individual's meaning of life. Research by Kirana et al. (2024) revealed that the meaning of life in survivors of mental disorders is achieved when the aspects of creative values, experience, and attitude are fulfilled, even though the individual is in a social condition full of stigma.

Furthermore, a theoretical study by Arrosi & Mukharom (2021) confirmed that logotherapy is based on three main principles: freedom of will, will to meaning, and meaning of life. Utari & Rifai (2020), from an Islamic psychology perspective, stated that meaning in life is the basis for human behavior, so that life is felt to be meaningful and beneficial. In general, the literature shows that trauma and difficult living conditions are closely related to the search for meaning in life, and that logotherapy is a relevant approach in understanding and dealing with these dynamics.

However, the majority of these studies focus on real human subjects, such as students, survivors of mental disorders, victims of domestic violence, or emerging adults, and rarely extend their analysis to the realm of popular media or fictional characters. Some literary studies have indeed used Frankl's theory, such as Rasyada's (2023) study of the main character in the novel "*Alzahaymar*", but the objects of study are still limited to written literary works and protagonists. In the study of film and popular culture in Indonesia, psychological analysis of antagonistic characters systematically linked to logotherapy is still relatively rare.

On the other hand, character psychology studies in film tend to focus on protagonists or main characters who experience positive growth. Antagonists are often treated as one-dimensional figures who merely represent evil, without in-depth exploration of their traumatic background, value conflicts, and search for meaning in life. In fact, antagonistic characters such as Akaza offer rich psychological complexity, as he stands at the crossroads between moral destruction, guilt, and the potential for existential awakening. Thus, there is a clear research gap at the intersection of three main domains: narrative trauma, the search for meaning in life within the framework of Viktor Frankl's logotherapy, and the representation of antagonistic characters in popular animated films. This study attempts to fill this gap by analyzing the character Akaza as a fictional antagonist who experiences deep trauma and a complex existential journey. This approach

not only expands the application of logotherapy theory to non-clinical subjects but also challenges the common assumption that antagonists lack depth of meaning in life.

The uniqueness of this study lies in its focus on antagonistic characters in popular anime films, which are analyzed through the perspective of Frankl's existential psychology. Akaza is not positioned solely as a symbol of evil, but as an individual who experiences an existential vacuum, a distortion of values, and ultimately an existential confrontation with himself. Thus, this research has strong theoretical relevance because it demonstrates the flexibility and scope of logotherapy theory in understanding existential dynamics outside the context of real humans.

Based on this background, this study aims to answer the following research questions: What are the forms and manifestations of trauma experienced by the character Akaza in the film "Demon Slayer: Infinity Castle"? How does this trauma affect Akaza's search for and distortion of the meaning of life within the framework of Viktor E. Frankl's logotherapy theory? How does the process of Akaza's identity transformation and existential attitude choices reflect the concepts of will to meaning, freedom of will, and self-transcendence?

The purpose of this study is to analyze the trauma of the character Akaza psychologically and narratively, explain the process of his search for meaning in life through the perspective of logotherapy, and show that fictional antagonists can be valid and meaningful subjects of existential study. In addition to providing a theoretical contribution to the study of existential psychology in Indonesia, this research is also expected to provide a cultural and pedagogical contribution by showing that popular media can be a reflective tool for understanding the relationship between trauma, attitude choices, and the meaning of life.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive-interpretive design to analyze the dynamics of trauma and the search for meaning in the life of the character Akaza in the film "Demon Slayer: Infinity Castle". A qualitative approach was chosen because this study does not aim to measure variables quantitatively or test statistical hypotheses, but rather to understand, interpret, and describe the meanings contained in the subjective experiences and narratives of fictional characters. Qualitative research emphasizes the process of interpreting meaning, context, and depth of understanding of the phenomenon being studied (Ahmadi, 2019).

According to Abdussamad (2021), qualitative research is used to study natural objects with the researcher as the main instrument, data collection is carried out purposively, and data analysis is inductive and meaning-oriented, not generalization-oriented. This principle is relevant to this study because the object of study is fictional characters in films, which must be understood through the accompanying narrative, visual, dialogue, and psychological contexts. Thus, the qualitative method allows researchers to interpret Akaza's traumatic experiences and the process of searching for the meaning of life comprehensively and deeply.

The object of this study is divided into material and formal objects. The material object of the study is the Japanese animated film "Demon Slayer: Infinity Castle", which is an adaptation of the manga "Kimetsu no Yaiba" by Koyoharu Gotouge. Specifically, this study focuses on the character Akaza as the main antagonist in the film. Akaza was chosen because he has a complex narrative background, involving repeated traumatic experiences, identity transformation from human to demon, and ongoing value conflicts. The formal object of this study is the trauma and search for meaning in the life of the character Akaza, analyzed through the perspective of existential psychology, specifically Viktor E. Frankl's theory of logotherapy. Thus, this study not only examines the character of Akaza as a story character but also places him as an existential subject who experiences suffering, existential vacuum, pseudo-meaning, and the possibility of self-transcendence.

The emphasis on this formal object distinguishes this study from film studies that are purely semiotic or structural in nature.

The data in this study are qualitative-descriptive. The main data consists of narrative and visual data that represent Akaza's traumatic experiences, inner conflicts, and search for meaning in life. The data includes character dialogues, internal monologues, scene excerpts, visual expressions, and cinematographic symbols relevant to Akaza's psychological and existential conditions. The data sources in this study are divided into two categories, namely primary data sources and secondary data sources. The primary data source is the film "*Demon Slayer: Infinity Castle*" itself, including flashbacks, dialogues between characters, and visual representations that show the dynamics of Akaza's trauma and identity transformation. To enrich the context of the analysis, this study also refers to relevant scenes from other series of the "*Kimetsu no Yaiba*" manga, such as "*Mugen Train Arc*, *Entertainment District Arc*," and "*Swordsmith Village Arc*," as long as these scenes are directly related to the construction of Akaza's trauma and meaning of life.

Secondary data sources include theoretical and empirical literature related to existential psychology, Viktor E. Frankl's logotherapy, trauma, and the meaning of life. This literature includes Frankl's main books (Frankl, 2006; 2014), national and international journal articles discussing logotherapy, as well as research in Indonesia examining the meaning of life and trauma, such as Utami & Setiawati (2018), Fitriana & Hadjam (2016), Kirana et al. (2024), and Maurits et al. (2023). This literature serves as a theoretical foundation and empirical comparison in the process of interpreting film data.

Data collection was conducted through documentation and non-participatory observation of the film. The documentation technique was used to collect data in the form of dialogues, monologues, and film scenes relevant to the research focus. The researcher watched the film repeatedly to understand the storyline, Akaza's characterization, and the emotional and psychological context of each important scene.

The data collection stages were carried out systematically. First, the researcher watched the entire film "*Demon Slayer: Infinity Castle*" to gain a complete understanding of the narrative and the development of Akaza's character. Second, the researcher selectively replayed scenes that depicted traumatic experiences, inner conflicts, and moments of searching for the meaning of life. Third, the researcher transcribed Akaza's dialogues and monologues using Indonesian subtitles as a reference, then selected transcripts relevant to the logotherapy theoretical framework. In addition, the researcher conducted an in-depth literature review of relevant theoretical and empirical sources. This literature review not only served as a theoretical background but also as an interpretive validation tool, so that the analysis of the film data was not purely subjective but based on established scientific concepts in existential psychology.

The data analysis technique used in this study was thematic analysis. Thematic analysis was chosen because it allowed the researcher to identify, group, and interpret the main themes that emerged in Akaza's character narrative, particularly the themes of trauma, meaninglessness, value distortion, and self-transcendence. This technique is in line with the descriptive-interpretive approach, which aims to understand the meaning behind the character's subjective experiences. The data analysis process was carried out in several stages. First, the researcher conducted familiarization, which involved reading and reviewing the dialogue transcripts and scene notes to understand the context and emotional nuances of the data. Second, the researcher carried out the coding process, which involved assigning codes to data units that represented experiences of trauma, guilt, loss, the search for meaning, and existential choices. These codes were then grouped into broader thematic categories. Third, the researcher linked the themes that had been formed to the main concepts in Viktor E. Frankl's logotherapy, such as the will to meaning, freedom of will, existential vacuum, noogenic neurosis, and self-transcendence. At this stage, the analysis was interpretive, in which the film data was understood as a symbolic

representation of human existential dynamics. Fourth, the researcher compiled an analytical narrative by integrating findings from the film data and theoretical literature, resulting in a coherent understanding of Akaza's existential journey.

To maintain the validity and consistency of the analysis, the researcher conducted theoretical triangulation by comparing the interpretation of the film data with the findings of previous studies on trauma and the meaning of life. Thus, the results of the analysis not only reflect the researchers' subjective reading but are also in line with the broader academic discourse.

In qualitative research, the researcher acts as the main instrument (Abdussama, 2021). Therefore, the researcher's reflective awareness is important in the analysis process. The researcher realizes that the object of study, which is a fictional character, has limitations compared to real human subjects. However, these limitations do not diminish the value of the analysis, because the purpose of the research is not to make a clinical diagnosis, but to understand the psychological and existential representations in the film narrative. The limitations of this study lie in the focus of the analysis, which is only directed at the character of Akaza and does not cover other characters in depth. In addition, the analysis was conducted within the framework of Viktor E. Frankl's logotherapy theory, so that the interpretation of the meaning of life and trauma was not extended to other psychological approaches. These limitations were imposed to maintain the depth of analysis and theoretical consistency. With this methodological design, this study is expected to provide a systematic and in-depth analysis and contribute significantly to the study of existential psychology, film analysis, and popular culture studies in Indonesia.

RESULT

This section presents the results of the analysis of the representation of trauma and the search for the meaning of life by the character Akaza in the film "*Demon Slayer: Infinity Castle*". The results are compiled based on primary data in the form of scenes, dialogues, and monologues of the characters, as well as visual observations that display Akaza's psychological and narrative dynamics. The results are presented descriptively and chronologically in accordance with the stages of the character's experiences, without entering into in-depth theoretical discussions or comparisons with previous studies.

Akaza's Past Trauma as an Early Suffering Experience

The analysis results show that Akaza's trauma stems from his past experiences when he was still a human named Hakuji. The film shows a series of flashbacks depicting the social and psychological conditions of Hakuji as the son of a seriously ill father. In several scenes, Hakuji is depicted stealing money to buy medicine for his father. The villagers find out about this, so Hakuji is punished and physically beaten until he is bruised and battered. This scene is shown through visuals of Hakuji's bruised and battered body.

This initial trauma is reinforced by the scene of the discovery of Hakuji's father's body hanging in a shack. In this scene, his father leaves a written message:

"Hakuji. You can live honestly. Sorry for the trouble."

This scene is accompanied by Hakuji's internal dialogue, which shows intense emotional reactions, anger, sadness, and confusion:

"Are poor people not even allowed to live? Father... To hell with this world... To hell with all of them! Why do you scum get to keep living? Why did my father have to die? He wasn't a burden. Why did he apologize? My father didn't do anything wrong! I can endure any punishment... They can whip me as they please, but I will endure it all for you! I don't want to hear it! I can't earn enough money to buy his medicine. My father's health is deteriorating rapidly. You can see his ribs through his back. I'm sure with proper care, he will recover! I am willing to die in his place. For my father!"

The data shows that the experience of losing his father, accompanied by guilt, anger, and social injustice, became an early trauma that was deeply ingrained in Hakuji. The visualization of a pale face, trembling body, and dark background reinforces the impression of deep psychological suffering.

The Phase of Temporary Recovery and Second Loss

After his father's death, the film shows a relatively stable phase in Hakuji's life when he is taken in as a student by Keizo, a dojo master, and forms a relationship with Koyuki. In several scenes, Akaza is shown caring for Koyuki attentively. When Keizo expresses his intention to hand over the dojo and Koyuki to Hakuji, the character shows an expression of happiness and hope.

Akaza's internal monologue in this phase reads:

“...At that time, I wanted nothing more than to protect them both with my life...”

And continues with:

“Yes. I will become stronger than anyone else and protect you for the rest of my life...”

This data shows a change in the character's emotional state towards a sense of purpose in life and strong relational bonds. However, this phase ends tragically when Hakuji finds Koyuki and Keizo poisoned by a rival dojo upon his return from his father's grave. This scene is shown against a backdrop of heavy rain and Hakuji's pale expression.

Akaza's monologue in the scene states:

“...Once again, the most important people in my life have died. And I wasn't even there...”

This event became the second significant trauma in Hakuji's life. The loss of Koyuki and Keizo not only repeated his previous experience of loss, but also destroyed the only safe space and hope for life that he had built after his father's death. The film then shows Hakuji spontaneously slaughtering his rival's dojo with his bare hands in response to his suffering. This act of violence is depicted without clear emotional expression, as if carried out in a state of loss of self-control. The visual contrast of blood with Akaza's empty gaze shows a drastic change in the character's psychological state and behavior, from an individual who was previously oriented towards protection and relational bonds to a figure driven by anger and inner emptiness. This scene marks an important turning point in the narrative, where suffering is no longer responded to through hope or relationships, but through destruction.

Transformation into a Demon: Distortion of the Meaning of Life

The analysis shows that after losing Koyuki and Keizo, Akaza underwent an identity change marked by his encounter with Kibutsuji Muzan. In a scene on a deserted road with bloody footprints, Muzan delivers the following dialogue:

“I heard a commotion about demons in this area. But I don't remember placing any here. I came all this way, only to find ordinary humans. How boring.”

Hakuji, overcome with anger, asks Muzan to leave and threatens him. But before Hakuji can finish his sentence, Muzan is already standing in front of him and thrusts his hand into Hakuji's head, saying:

“I'm considering creating 12 powerful demons. Can you handle the amount of blood I'll give you?”

When Muzan offered his blood, Hakuji, who had lost everything, replied weakly:

“I... I no longer care about anything.”

After transforming into a demon, Akaza monologued:

“I became a demon and lost my memories. All I care about now is becoming strong...”

“Even though there’s nothing left to protect.”

“Again, give me more!”

This data shows a loss of life orientation that was previously centered on relationships and the protection of those closest to him. After this transformation, the character's focus shifted to an obsessive search for power, which was displayed through dialogue, monologues, and repetitive behavior patterns. Power is positioned as the main purpose of Akaza's existence, no longer as a means to protect or maintain relational values. This change in orientation is reflected in his attitude of rejecting weakness, glorifying combat, and defining his existence through victory and physical domination. Thus, power becomes the center of the character's life and replaces the previous meaning of life that came from emotional relationships and personal responsibility.

Pattern of Searching for Meaning through Combat

In the battle scene against Kyōjurō Rengoku (in the prequel film “*Demon Slayer: Mugen Train*”), Akaza utters the following dialogue:

“Become a demon, Kyōjurō. If you become a demon, you can continue training for 100 or even 200 years. You can become strong.”

The visualization of Akaza's bright blue eyes and euphoric expression during battle shows that fighting is the center of his life. These scenes are shown repeatedly in the context of conflict, emphasizing that fighting is no longer just a means of self-defense but a space for self-actualization for the character. Akaza's emotional response, shown through smiles, enthusiasm, and intense body movements, reinforces the image that he derives satisfaction from the battle itself. This data shows that strength and fighting have become dominant values in Akaza's post-transformation life orientation, replacing the relational values and life goals he once had as a human being.

The Emergence of Flashbacks and Self-Awareness

During the battle at “*Infinity Castle*” against Tanjiro Kamado and Giyu Tomioka, the film shows a flashback scene where Akaza hears Koyuki's voice:

“Stop... Hakuji-san, that’s enough... Stop this, let’s get out of here...”

This scene is accompanied by a visual change from dark red to bluish gray. Akaza then meets his father's shadow and says:

“Forgive me, father. I’m sorry, I can’t live honestly.”

Next, an emotional dialogue with Koyuki is shown:

“I’m sorry! I’m sorry, I can’t protect you! I’m sorry for not being there! I couldn’t keep any of my promises! I’m sorry! Please, forgive me! I’m sorry...”

The flashback scene marks the emergence of self-awareness in Akaza, which had been overshadowed by his desire to fight and search for power. Koyuki's voice serves as an emotional trigger that reopens his old memories and identity as Hakuji. The visual change from dark red to bluish gray reinforces the transition in the character's inner state, from aggression to reflection and remorse. The appearance of his father's shadow and Akaza's apology show that his long-buried guilt is beginning to surface in his consciousness. The emotional dialogue with Koyuki further emphasizes that Akaza is once again faced with his failure to fulfill the promises, responsibilities, and values that were once central to his

life. Thus, this flashback not only serves as a revelation of the past but also as a moment of inner confrontation that opens up space for a change in the character's attitude.

Conflict with Muzan and Rejection of Old Values

Another scene, “*Kimetsu No Yaiba: Entertainment District Arc*,” shows Akaza’s interaction with Muzan, which is full of contempt. Muzan says:

“You’re so proud to report that you killed a Pillar, but there are still three more Demon Slayers at that location, right? Why didn’t you finish them off? I went to the trouble of sending you there because you happened to be nearby. Akaza... Akaza... Akaza... Akaza! You disappoint me... I didn’t expect you to be attacked by a swordsman who isn’t even a Pillar. It seems that the third Upper Moon Demon is also very disappointing. Get lost.”

Akaza just bowed his head and trembled. In another sequence clip, “*Kimetsu No Yaiba: Swordsmith Village Arc*” a scene is shown of the Upper Moon Demons gathering to discuss the death of Gyutaro, who was also a member of the Upper Moon Demons. Muzan stated:

“He lost because he left too much of his humanity behind.”

Akaza’s response remains submissive and silent, demonstrating his subordinate position before Muzan. This attitude is consistently displayed in various interactions, especially when Akaza accepts verbal insults and pressure without open resistance. In the scene in “*Kimetsu No. Yaiba: Infinity Castle*,” the character’s inner symbolism is shown through a visual change when Muzan’s shadow standing in front of Akaza, slowly transforms into the figure of Koyuki. This visual shift signifies the ongoing inner conflict within Akaza, where the influence of Muzan’s destructive values clashes with his emotional memories of the figure who once gave him meaning in life. The appearance of Koyuki’s shadow shows that Hakuji’s moral instincts are not completely gone, but rather dormant and reemerging in moments of crisis.

The Battle at Infinity Castle: Confrontation with Oneself

In the battle against Kamado Tanjiro and Tomioka Giyu, there is a scene where Tanjiro wants to save Giyu, but his sword slips from his hand. However, Tanjiro still tries to save Giyu by hitting Akaza’s cheek, and a flashback appears showing the shadow of Keizo’s face. Then Akaza monologues:

“I hate the weak. The weak never fight directly. Instead, they poison the well. It makes me sick! Weak people lack patience. They quickly give in to despair! I kill people with fists that should be used to protect! I tarnish my master’s precious Soryu style! I cannot fulfill my father’s last wish! Yes, the one I must kill is...”

At this moment, Akaza unleashes a technique to destroy himself. Akaza gives Tanjiro a warm smile as if to say, “*Thank you.*”

He realizes that even though he has become a demon, he still has the freedom to choose his attitude towards the suffering he experiences. This awareness is demonstrated through his actions, deliberately directing attacks at himself in the midst of battle. Visually, the blue-white light that emanates from Akaza’s body as a result of these attacks is an important marker of the conscious decision he has made. This visual effect highlights the difference between the attacks he received from his opponents and the actions that came from his own will. Thus, this scene shows that self-destruction was not merely the result of physical defeat, but the result of Akaza’s personal choice in responding to the inner conflict and suffering he faced.

The Decision to Stop Regeneration

The climax scene shows Akaza choosing to stop his regeneration. The dialogue heard is:

"Stop! Stop regenerating! The fight is over! I lost! At that moment, I was defeated. It's that simple. It was an incredible technique. He read my movements and struck perfectly. He slashed my neck before I even had time to react. It's over. So just let me go to Hell in peace."

The scene then continues with Akaza meeting his father's shadow, who transforms into his mentor Keizo, but suddenly changes into Muzan and says:

"Don't you want to be strong? Is this really the end for you, Akaza?"

Akaza responds:

"You're right. I want to become even stronger. So what if I'm beheaded? 'Defeat' is irrelevant. I will kill them all! I can still become stronger! As I promised. So that I can protect you!"

As Muzan tried to influence Akaza, Koyuki's voice appeared:

"Hakuji-san... Thank you, you've done enough. It's enough. It's more than enough."

Koyuki's presence made Akaza ignore Muzan's screams, then Akaza said while crying and hugging Koyuki:

"Forgive me! I'm sorry, I couldn't protect you! I'm sorry for not being there! I couldn't keep any of my promises! Forgive me! Please forgive me! Forgive me..."

Koyuki's soft voice could be heard saying:

"I'm so glad you remember us. I'm so glad you've come back to us, Hakuji-san."

The scene shows Hakuji's father (Akaza's human name) and his teacher welcoming Hakuji back after he had been Akaza for so long and forgotten them.

Akaza then says:

"I'm home, my dear!"

And is answered:

"Welcome back, my love."

The series of scenes and dialogues show the final inner conflict experienced by Akaza before his decision to end regeneration. The internal dialogue that emerges shows the tug-of-war between his old desire to be strong and his new awareness of his limitations. The presence of Muzan's shadow represents the remnants of Akaza's life orientation, which is still centered on power and battle, while Koyuki's voice serves as a reminder of the relational values that were once his life's goal. The shift in visual focus from Muzan to Koyuki confirms Akaza's shift in consciousness from destructive ambition to acceptance of himself and his past. Akaza's embrace of Koyuki and his repeated apologies show the release of long-suppressed emotions, as well as a sign of inner reconciliation. Thus, this scene represents the narrative climax where Akaza consciously leaves his old impulses behind and chooses to end his existential conflict.

Final Reconciliation

The final scene shows Hakuji's spirit embracing Koyuki in a blaze of fire that engulfs them both. This visual is presented with a calm expression and without conflict, in contrast to the representations of fighting and violence that dominated the previous scenes. The presence of fire not only serves as a visual backdrop but also marks the end of Akaza's existence as a demon and the return of Hakuji's identity as a human. The embrace represents acceptance, peace, and emotional connection that had long been severed due to the characters' trauma and life choices. This data shows the closure of the characters'

journey through emotional and symbolic reconciliation, where Hakuji's inner conflict, guilt, and suffering reach a complete end.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study show that Akaza's journey in the film "*Demon Slayer: Infinity Castle*" represents complex existential dynamics, particularly related to trauma, meaninglessness, and the process of reinterpreting life. From Viktor E. Frankl's logotherapy perspective, Akaza's traumatic experiences can be understood as a form of existential suffering, which is suffering that is not only psychological but also touches on the dimension of life's meaning. The repeated losses experienced by Akaza, his father, teacher, and fiancée, create an existential condition marked by the destruction of values, guilt, and disconnection from life's purpose. Frankl (2006) asserts that suffering that is not given meaning has the potential to give rise to an existential vacuum, a condition that is clearly evident in Akaza's post-traumatic phase of life.

Akaza's early trauma of his father's death formed the foundation of his guilt and existential anger. In logotherapy, guilt is not seen merely as a pathological burden, but as a moral signal that the individual is aware of a violated value or unfulfilled purpose (Frankl, 2014). However, in Akaza's case, this guilt was not processed reflectively, so it developed into anger towards the world and himself. This condition is in line with Frankl's view that suffering without meaning can push individuals away from human values and cause them to lose their orientation in life.

Akaza's phase of life with Keizo and Koyuki shows the reemergence of meaning in life through love and responsibility. In the framework of logotherapy, love is understood as one of the main paths to meaning in life, because through love, individuals are able to see and actualize the potential for meaning in others (Frankl, 2006). Akaza's relationship with Koyuki and Keizo shows that the meaning of his life at this stage is not centered on himself, but on protecting and serving others. However, the tragic deaths of these two figures cause the collapse of the structure of meaning that had been formed, causing Akaza to fall back into an even deeper existential void.

Akaza's transformation into a demon can be understood as a distortion of the meaning of life. Frankl refers to this condition as noogenic neurosis, a disorder that arises from the loss of meaning in life, rather than simply psychological conflict (Frankl, 2014). In this condition, individuals still have the drive to search for meaning (will to meaning), but this search is directed towards pseudo-meaning. For Akaza, power and struggle become substitutes for the lost meaning of life. Violence and immortality are perceived as solutions to feelings of loss and helplessness, even though existentially, they actually deepen his inner emptiness.

This finding is in line with the research by Arrosi & Mukharom (2021), which states that the loss of meaning in life often drives individuals to seek compensation through external values such as power or domination. In the context of Akaza, physical strength and victory in battle become symbols of control over the world that previously destroyed him. However, logotherapy asserts that meaning in life cannot be found through ego gratification or power, but rather through an orientation toward values that transcend the self (self-transcendence). Therefore, Akaza's search for meaning through strength can be understood as a temporary existential failure.

Akaza's interaction with Muzan Kibutsuji represents a conflict of values within the framework of logotherapy. Muzan functions as a symbol of nihilism and the denial of suffering, offering escape through absolute power and rejection of guilt. In Frankl's view, this condition reflects the existential tension between the urge to avoid suffering and the demand to give it meaning. Akaza, who is in a state of meaninglessness, accepts Muzan's values as a temporary way out. However, this acceptance requires the sacrifice of human values and meaningful relationships, which ultimately intensifies the character's inner conflict.

Emotional flashbacks to Koyuki, Keizo, and his father become Akaza's existential turning point. In logotherapy, awareness of lost values is the first step toward re-giving meaning to suffering. (Frankl, 2006) asserts that humans always have the freedom to choose their attitude toward unchangeable circumstances (freedom of will). At this moment, Akaza is no longer completely controlled by the destructive values instilled by Muzan, but is faced with an existential choice between continuing violence or acknowledging his failure as a human being.

Akaza's decision to stop regenerating and accept death can be understood as a manifestation of attitudinal value, which is the ability to find meaning through one's attitude towards inevitable suffering. In logotherapy, attitudinal values are the highest form of meaning when individuals can no longer change a situation but can still choose how to deal with it (Frankl, 2014). Akaza's actions are not merely a form of despair but a conscious choice to end the cycle of violence and accept the existential consequences of his life.

This process demonstrates the achievement of self-transcendence, a condition in which individuals transcend their ego interests and direct themselves toward higher values. In Akaza's case, these values lie in the recognition of love, responsibility, and acceptance of guilt. The self-redemption experienced by Akaza does not take the form of social recovery or conventional happiness, but rather an existential acceptance of death as the end of suffering and inner conflict. This broadens the understanding of the meaning of life in logotherapy, that meaning is not always synonymous with success or happiness, but can be realized through acceptance and redemption.

When placed in a broader research landscape, these findings complement studies on the meaning of life in Indonesia that have so far focused on real human subjects. Research by Utami & Setiawati (2018) and Kirana et al. (2024) shows that individuals experiencing difficult conditions can find meaning in life through reflection and choosing a positive attitude. However, this study shows that in the context of fictional narratives, the process of meaning-making can take on a more tragic and symbolic form. This difference does not contradict Frankl's theory but rather affirms the flexibility of logotherapy in various contexts of representation.

Furthermore, this study expands the study of character psychology by positioning the antagonist as a complete existential subject. Until now, antagonists have often been reduced to symbols of evil without psychological depth. Through the perspective of logotherapy, Akaza is understood as an individual who failed to make sense of suffering in the early stages but ultimately achieved existential awareness through guilt and love. These findings correct the bias in the literature that focuses the search for meaning only on protagonists or individuals who end up with positive growth.

The theoretical implications of this research show that Viktor E. Frankl's logotherapy can be productively applied in the analysis of fictional characters and popular media. Film, as a visual medium, is capable of representing abstract concepts such as meaninglessness, freedom of choice, and self-transcendence in a symbolic and emotional way. Thus, fictional narratives function not only as entertainment but also as a valid space for psychological reflection.

Overall, this discussion confirms that Akaza's existential journey is a concrete illustration of the dynamics of Frankl's logotherapy: suffering as an existential condition, meaninglessness as a crisis, choice of attitude as the core of human freedom, and self-transcendence as the pinnacle of meaning. This research not only enriches the study of existential psychology in Indonesia but also opens up new space for the use of film and popular culture as a medium for psychological and educational analysis.

CONCLUSION

This study aims to analyze the trauma and search for meaning in the life of the character Akaza in the film "*Demon Slayer: Infinity Castle*" through the perspective of existential

psychology, specifically Viktor E. Frankl's theory of logotherapy. Based on the results of the analysis and discussion, it can be concluded that the character Akaza represents complex existential dynamics, in which repeated trauma, emptiness of meaning, and existential choices significantly shape his life journey.

Answering the first research question, the results show that the trauma experienced by Akaza is layered and recurring, starting with the loss of his father, followed by the death of his teacher and fiancée. These experiences not only impacted the character's psychological condition but also shook his value structure and identity. This trauma formed a deep existential suffering, marked by guilt, anger towards the world, and the collapse of life's purpose, which then became the foundation of the emptiness of meaning within Akaza.

Answering the second research question, this study finds that the trauma drives Akaza to search for meaning in life through distorted means. Within the framework of Frankl's logotherapy, this aimless search for meaning manifests itself in the form of pseudo-meaning, namely an obsession with power, fighting, and immortality after he turns into a demon. Power became a substitute for lost meaning in life, not as a means of transcendence, but as compensation for feelings of loss and helplessness. This condition shows how the failure to make sense of suffering can plunge individuals into existential emptiness and destructive behavior.

Answering the third research question, this study concludes that Akaza's identity transformation reached a turning point when he was confronted again with the values that had once given him meaning, namely love, responsibility, and guilt. Through flashbacks to significant figures in his life, Akaza was faced with the freedom to choose his attitude towards suffering that could not be changed. Akaza's decision to stop regenerating and accept death represents the actualization of freedom of will and attitudinal value in Frankl's logotherapy. This action marks the achievement of self-transcendence, in which Akaza overcomes egoistic impulses and the cycle of violence for the sake of inner peace and self-redemption.

Overall, this study confirms that fictional antagonists such as Akaza can be valid existential subjects in psychological studies. The application of Viktor E. Frankl's logotherapy theory in film character analysis shows that the meaning of life is not always manifested in the form of conventional happiness or success, but can emerge through the acceptance of suffering and responsible choices. Thus, this study contributes to the development of existential psychology studies in Indonesia by expanding the object of study to the realm of popular culture, as well as emphasizing the potential of film as a reflective and educational medium in understanding trauma and the search for meaning in life.

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