

Exploring Freudian Defense Mechanism Theory in the Portrayal of Paul Atreides in the Movie 'Dune'

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Abstract

This study explores the complex character of Paul Atreides in the movie "Dune" (2021), using psychoanalysis theory to uncover the hidden behaviors that determine Paul's psyche. While many analyses of "Dune" exist, there is a gap in that existing research focuses on broader themes, and this study tries to fill that gap by providing an in-depth exploration of Paul's psyche. This study aims to point out and interpret Paul's defense mechanisms in response to the chaotic events on Arrakis by analyzing the film's narrative and character development. This analysis uses qualitative research with Freud's psychoanalytical frameworks through Defense Mechanism Theory to examine the main character's psyche, motivations, and development in the movie "Dune." The methodology analyzes the character's actions, interactions, and personal journeys within the narrative, shedding light on their role in the film's narrative. The results show four types of Defense Mechanisms found in Paul Atreides as a protagonist in the movie "Dune": repression, denial, projection, and sublimation. This study concludes that the psyche, motivations, and character development of the main character, Paul Atreides, are evoked by the relationships and situations present in the film's narrative using a psychoanalytic framework.

Keywords: Movie analysis, psychoanalytic, defense mechanism, Paul Atreides, Dune movie

INTRODUCTION

Movies are a type of media in which videos are created based on actual concepts, but they also need to include vague elements of meaning and entertainment (Fussalam et al., 2019). A movie is a cultural product and a means of artistic expression, trying to understand it means trying to understand the human culture that produced it (Effendy et al., 2023). Movies use symbolism, metaphor, and imagery to communicate, much like poetry does. It also communicates both verbally and visually like drama does, verbally through dialogue and visually through action and gesture. Therefore, in line with the development of literary criticism, a movie can become an object of literary and cultural studies analysis that is currently being researched by many academics.

The release of the latest Dune movie in 2021 has raised discussions on visual, interpretation, and character portrayals. Among these characters, Paul Atreides stands out as the protagonist, navigating a complex narrative filled with challenges and changes. Paul Atreides, played by actor Timothée Chalamet, has a central role in the story. As the son of Duke Leto Atreides, he finds himself thrust onto an unwelcoming desert planet called Arrakis. Paul must face his destiny as a messianic figure, dealing with political intrigue, warfare, and personal dilemmas. Understanding the psychological dimensions of Paul's character is crucial to understanding his reactions and motivations throughout the movie.

Although Dune has been the subject of much analysis, the character of Paul Atreides requires focused observation through a psychoanalytical lens. Previous research tends to focus on broader themes and story elements. For example, previous research by Alfarisi et al. (2022) which analyzes the causes of Paul Atreides' internal conflict in the context of the novel Dune. The

results showed that the internal conflict Paul experienced was caused by conflicting perceptions and conflicting needs. Internal conflicts arise from Paul's thoughts and decision-making processes as a result of external conflicts that rely on Paul to resolve them. Second, a study by Knežková & Pospíšil (2007) that focuses on the scope of feminist criticism, which analyzes the role of women in previous Dune film adaptations. The results show that certain female roles resist the roles assigned to them and thus break stereotypes and show their strength. Third, another perspective from a feminist lens, a study by Evans (2016) which seeks to show that a cyborgian reading of the novel Dune contains the substance of technology's fear of misogyny. The results show that the female characters in Frank Herbert's Dune novel challenge traditional gender stereotypes. Looking at these research gaps, it becomes clear that existing research still lacks a variation of adequately exploring the psychological depth of Paul Atreides' character. Since other analyses have not discussed his defense mechanisms and their influence on his behavior, they overlook the most important aspects that contribute to the formation of his character and the whole story interpretation.

One of the main bases in analyzing a movie using psychoanalytical criticism is Sigmund Freud's theory of psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis in general is a theory that has the benefit of analyzing human psychology based on three components, namely the id, ego, and superego (Habsy et al, 2023). Hossain in Niaz et al. (2019) categorize the modern theory of psychoanalysis, which finds application in literature, as having two main functions. Firstly, it serves as a therapeutic tool for individuals with mental health disorders. Second, it serves as an explanation. So psychoanalytical criticism can be defined as a theory in interpreting literature that assumes the complexity of the human mind. It assumes the existence of unconscious internal states that motivate external behavior.

One of the ideas in Freud's psychoanalysis is the concept of defense mechanisms. Ego defense mechanisms or self-defense mechanisms can be defined as the subconscious's way of protecting itself from painful feelings or thoughts. It aims to suppress anxiety or internal conflicts that arise, even avoiding facing unpleasant realities. There are several categories of defense mechanisms including repression, denial, projection, and sublimation. The first one is repression. Repression can be defined as a suppression or blocking out of conscious awareness of certain thoughts, memories, or emotions (O'Neil, 2018). For example, when a person has a trauma or a bad past such as violence committed by her father, the person tends to prefer avoidance which means trying not to expose the past information and staying away from social relationships that are too close to the father. The second one is denial. Denial is a defense mechanism in which an individual refuses to face reality and does not wish to experience it (Niaz et al., 2019). For example, someone who has had trust issues and severe disappointment with their partner in the past will tend to deny reality and their feelings when experiencing feelings of falling in love again. This is done as a form of defense to overcome his anxiety or fear of the possibility of being hurt again by "closing eyes" to the threat of these feelings. The third one is projection. Projection can be understood as a defense mechanism in which an individual places their own blame or anger on another person (Tyson, 2015). For example, if one of our friends is insecure about their own intelligence, they may project that insecurity onto us or others by constantly criticizing and dismissing those they perceive to be less intelligent. This enables them to avoid confronting their own feelings of lacking while maintaining a sense of superiority. Another concept is sublimation. The psychological concept of sublimation refers to the conversion of socially unacceptable impulses into socially acceptable behaviors or actions. Redirecting the energy of the initial impulse towards a new socially acceptable goal or object allows this change to occur (Even-tzur & Hadar, 2019). For example, aggression towards something and prefer to transfer it to sports activities.

The objective of this study is to examine the character of Paul Atreides in the 2021 adaptation of the movie Dune through the lens of Freudian defense mechanisms and thus to contribute to the broader field of psychoanalytic film analysis by providing a different understanding of the main character. This study argues that Paul Atreides shows various Freudian defense mechanisms throughout the film. We analyze the scenes to find defense mechanisms such

as repression, denial, projection, and sublimation as he deals with the challenges and conflicts he faces. We argue that the use of defense mechanisms plays an important role in Paul's response to challenges. By examining how these mechanisms shape his character development, we can gain a deeper understanding of his transformation and story dynamics.

METHODS

The analysis focuses on the 2021 version of "Dune" directed by Dennis Villeneuve, pointing out scenes, language, and visual themes. These aspects were chosen based on their ability to expose examples of defense mechanisms in Paul Atreides' characters. A qualitative research approach was employed to get a thorough understanding. The researchers carefully classified the observed behaviors and interactions related to Paul Atreides. Some criteria are used to identify events where defense mechanisms such as repression, denial, projection, and sublimation are likely to be at play. The primary data are the dialogues, key scenes, and moments in the movie, while the secondary data are the literature review of articles referencing research related to Freud's defense mechanisms, along with researchers' evaluations. The examination involved numerous viewings of the films to improve accuracy. This qualitative approach seeks to capture minor differences while also ensuring the reliability and validity of observations gathered during the research process. Key scenes and character moments are carefully noted for further study. This data serves as the foundation for finding patterns and trends in Paul Atreides' characters' defense systems. The analysis focuses on interpreting cases of repression, denial, projection, and sublimation in the character of Paul Atreides. Patterns and trends are recognized and examined in the context of the story, character relationships, and important events in the film. The data collection technique involves observing all scenes and further analysis and conclusions.

FINDINGS AND EVIDENCE

The term "defense mechanism" refers to a mechanism that protects an individual from uncomfortable emotions, beliefs, and desires (Vaillant, 1992, p. 4-5). Moreover, (Cramer, 1998) Defense mechanisms are means that take place without conscious effort or awareness (i.e., they are unconscious). Furthermore, defense mechanisms operate despite conscious intentionality; the latter function to affect an inner psychological state but can also have no impact on outward reality, resulting in nonveridical senses, or reality deception.

As the research had been conducted, there were four types of Ego Defense Mechanisms found in Paul Atreides as a protagonist in the movie "Dune" (2021) namely, repression, denial, projection, and sublimation.

Repression

Repression occurs when an individual's disturbing thoughts are suppressed and integrated into their unconscious (Niaz et al., 2019 p. 39). Although the idea of repression as a psychological defense mechanism isn't shown in an explicit way, several scenes can be understood as Paul dealing with his emotional struggles and internal conflicts. The Gom Jabbar scene might be seen through the lens of potential repression.

Paul undergoes severe pain in the Gom Jabbar test as his hand is placed inside a box and a poisoned needle is placed close to his neck by Reverend Mother Gaius Helen Mohiam. The purpose of the test is to evaluate someone's ability to restrain their emotions and instincts. His reaction to the pain could be interpreted as a representation of Paul's internal struggles associated with his uncertain future. The scene may imply that Paul hides his agony and fear to some extent in an effort to show that he has emotional control in the face of a potentially fatal circumstance.

Denial

Denial is a defense mechanism that happens when someone refuses to accept reality. One notable scene that portrays elements of denial in the movie "Dune" occurs when Paul is still on his home planet, Caaldan before the Atreides family moves to Arrakis. In this scene, Paul's mother, Lady Jessica, warns him about the dangers and uncertainties they will face in Arrakis. However, Paul seems dismissive and somewhat resistant to the idea that his life is about to undergo a profound change.

This reluctance to accept the reality of his situation can be seen as a form of denial. Paul, at this point, may not fully comprehend or accept the gravity of his destiny as the Kwisatz Haderach and the political complexities awaiting him on Arrakis. His initial response reflects a common aspect of denial, where individuals resist acknowledging uncomfortable truths or impending challenges. As the narrative progresses, Paul's denial evolves, and he is gradually confronted with the undeniable truth of his destiny and the role he must play in the unfolding events on Arrakis. This evolution is a crucial aspect of his character development and the hero's journey in the "Dune" story.

Projection

Projection is a psychological defense mechanism that occurs when a person puts blame or anger on the other person (Niaz et al., 2019 p. 39). One scene that could be analyzed through the lens of projection is when Paul dreams about Chani, a Fremen woman, he may be projecting his desire for connection, affection, or love onto these pictures. The emotional burden he places on these visions could reflect his own desires and anxieties, projected onto the unknown future.

Sublimation

Sublimation replacing undesirable feelings with socially acceptable and useful acts instead of destructive ones (Niaz et al., 2019 p. 39). Paul's training sessions scene, especially with Gurney Halleck, is a noteworthy scene that exemplifies possible sublimation. Their interactions reveal Paul's extraordinary skills in hand-to-hand combat and the use of various weapons. Paul's skill in martial arts and combat techniques may be seen as a way for him to sublimate his frustrations, worries, and doubts into concentrated, methodical physical training.

By engaging in intense combat training, Paul might be redirecting the emotional turmoil and existential concerns associated with his destiny and the challenges he faces on Arrakis. His combat prowess becomes a socially acceptable outlet for the intense emotions he experiences, allowing him to transform his anxieties into a valuable skill set.

Table. 1 Intense combat training

Time	Scene	Defense Mechanism
24:30 - 29:14	Paul undergoes severe pain in the Gom Jabbar test.	Repression
29:36 - 30:46	Paul belittled his mother's warnings about the dangers and uncertainties in Arrakis.	Denial
1:07:24 - 1:09:08	Paul dreams about Chani.	Projection
15:42 - 18:17	Paul's training sessions with Gurney Halleck.	Sublimation

DISCUSSION

Characters in films often reflect intricate psychological elements. This research explores Paul Atreides' multifaceted character, concentrating on the ways in which he represents Freudian defense mechanisms in "Dune." By analyzing how Freudian concepts of projection, sublimation, repression, and denial appear in Paul's persona.

Paul Atreides in "Dune" illustrates Freudian defense mechanisms, with each aspect of his character revealing a psychological depth that reflects the intricate nature of human intellect. Paul serves as a channel for the subtle manifestation of Freud's theories, going beyond a simple protagonist role. The individual's experience is a complex composition, where various psychological defense mechanisms such as projection, sublimation, repression, and denial contribute diverse elements to the overall depiction of their psyche. This analysis seeks to examine the complexities of Paul's character, analyzing how Freudian notions intimately influence his choices, interactions, and internal struggles, finally unveiling the intricate pattern of his psychological state throughout the movie.

Repression

According to the Freudian Defense Mechanism theory, repression is the unconscious pushing of sensations, ideas, or memories that are uncomfortable out of conscious awareness. In "Dune," Paul Atreides demonstrates repression by stifling particular memories, wants, or feelings in order to avoid psychological discomfort. His actions and words provide examples that support this idea in Freudian thought. Throughout the movie, his decisions and behaviors are influenced by these examples, which highlight his subconscious attempts to protect himself from uncomfortable thoughts or urges. Paul's experiences with trauma, such as the disruption of his family's history and the discovery of his prophetic gifts, illustrate repression. He conceals painful memories and desires, which exposes a complicated internal battle that influences his choices and actions throughout the story.

In addition to suppressing memories, Paul Atreides in "Dune" demonstrates repression through a complex emotional journey. His battle with the weight of fate and heritage generates a psychological environment in which repression functions as an essential coping mechanism for traumatic events. Paul struggles with opposing wants and moral dilemmas in addition to repressing memories; this is a complex form of repression.

His internal struggle to come to terms with his prophetic gifts and the obligations that go along with it and his desire for a less complicated life free of such burdens is evident. This contradiction highlights his concealment of desires and aspirations in addition to memories. His attempts to repress these contradictory feelings and goals are consistent with Freudian theory, which holds that repression involves a wider range of psychological substances than just forgetting memories.

Moreover, Paul's social interactions reveal his battle with repression. His interactions show how his unconscious attempts to protect himself from discomfort unintentionally damage his relationships, especially with those closest to him. There is a noticeable tension between his deliberate decisions and the subconscious suppression of particular ideas or emotions.

To add, the way Paul's inner world is shown in the film—through dream sequences, visions, and reflective moments—provides a window into the depths of his repression. The complexity of his mentality and the layers of ideas and feelings he hides are shown by these graphic components, which also highlight his struggles with his subconscious.

Denial

One of Freud's defense strategies is denial, which is the rejection of an unsettling fact. In "Dune," Paul Atreides exhibits denial when confronted with difficult facts. He is reluctant to accept the scope of his fate and the implications that may follow. His attempt to skirt these facts and the ramifications they bear for who he is reveals a defensive tactic meant to shield him from the harsh realities that face him.

Paul Atreides goes beyond his unwillingness to acknowledge the full extent of his fate in "Dune" to demonstrate denial. It covers a wider range of realities with which he struggles, displaying a complex and multidimensional denial as a defensive tactic.

His denial encompasses not just his prophetic destiny but also the intricate social and political environment he finds himself in. Paul's initial unwillingness to accept the complexity of the power dynamics, the intricate network of connections, and the dangerous route he must follow further illustrates his denial. He makes an effort to keep things as normal as possible, essentially refusing to accept the seriousness of the problems he faces.

Moreover, Paul's denial is evident in the way he interacts with people. This protection mechanism is demonstrated by his unwillingness to completely heed the counsel and cautions of mentors and allies. He frequently downplays or avoids acknowledging the seriousness of the issues that are put before him, demonstrating his propensity to avoid facing up to hard realities.

Furthermore, Paul's identity is entwined with his denial. His denial is made worse by his battle to balance his background, his pedigree, and the expectations his ancestors set on him. He struggles with the contradiction between the person he wants to be and the person fate seems to

be forcing him to become, which leads him to maintain a constant state of denial in order to preserve his idealized self-concept.

Overall, the film's symbolic and metaphorical components emphasize Paul's denial. His subconscious denial is reflected in the dream sequences and reoccurring visual themes, which show a fractured mentality trying to make sense of the overwhelming truths he can't bring himself to embrace.

Projection

According to Freudian theory, the interaction demonstrates projection, when Paul attempts to deflect attention from his own anxieties by projecting characteristics that he finds frightening or difficult onto others, representing them in a way that distances him from these inner conflicts. This helps him to cast his concerns outside of himself and frame them as other people's problems rather than his own. He exhibits a sophisticated psychological protection mechanism when he projects his goals, anxieties, and uncertainties onto other people, especially in his dealings with Chani and the Fremen. These projections show the many levels of his inner conflicts and want.

Paul Atreides' use of projection in "Dune" illustrates a complicated psychological defense mechanism that incorporates his complex needs and anxieties while also allowing him to separate himself from inner conflicts.

Paul uses projection to do more than just divert attention from his worries; it becomes a complex strategy entwined with his changing relationships. These projections are nourished by his contacts with Chani and the Fremen. He projects his hopes, anxieties, and doubts onto them, tactfully attributing his own conflicts to outside factors. For example, the way he navigates and leads others around him reflects his dreams of a new life or his concerns about the weight of his fate.

Moreover, Paul's projection explores the many levels of his mind rather than just providing surface-level protection. Not only do his projections onto other people serve to externalize his worries, but they also serve to satisfy his need for approval or closure. Through projecting his hopes and fears onto people such as Chani or the Fremen, Paul unconsciously looks to them for a way to make amends or to find solace for his inner problems.

The movie's symbolic aspects also highlight Paul's projections. His prophetic visions, the desert's symbolism, and the sceneries all serve as visual depictions of his inner difficulties projected onto the outside world. His relationships with others, when combined with these symbolic aspects, accentuate the richness and depth of his projections.

Furthermore, the way Paul's projections change as the story progresses emphasizes how dynamic they are. His projections on other people change as he works through the complexity of his destiny and wrestles with the realities of leadership and power. These changes mirror his internal landscape and the development of his conflicts and wants.

Paul uses projection in "Dune" to mirror his complex inner conflicts, wants, and anxieties onto the canvas of his relationships and the outside world, rather than just using it as a psychological distancing technique.

Sublimation

In "Dune," Paul Atreides exemplifies the sublimation defense mechanism outlined by Freud by transforming his emotional and mental struggles into constructive or socially acceptable endeavors. He proves this by developing his leadership skills and adjusting to the harsh desert environment of Arrakis. It is evident that he is capable of turning his anxieties about his future and Arrakis' challenges into productive deeds. The transformation of inward conflicts into useful survival abilities is exemplified by learning from the Fremen and mastering the desert environment.

Furthermore, as he takes on a leadership role among the Fremen, he uses his personal struggles as a means of directing and leading others. His personal difficulties may have been channeled into constructive deeds by his commitment to protecting the future of the Fremen and using cunning techniques against enemies. All things considered, Paul's conversion of psychological and emotional struggles into constructive activities exemplifies the idea of

sublimation and emphasizes how he directs intense feelings and natural aptitudes into leadership and flexibility in the severe desert environment.

The sublimation defense mechanism is demonstrated by Paul Atreides in "Dune" in a way that goes beyond simple adaptation to the hostile Arrakis environment. His experience represents a deep metamorphosis of internal struggles into not just survival abilities but also a profound leadership philosophy and a transforming force in the Fremen society.

While his adjustment to the arid environment is a physical example of sublimation, it also serves as a doorway to a deeper transformation. Paul's proficiency with survival techniques serves as a metaphor for his capacity to turn inside challenges into worthwhile pursuits. His lessons from the Fremen are more than just how to survive in the desert; they are a metaphor for his development, with the unforgiving environment serving as a metaphor for the furnace that shapes his personality.

Not only that, but Paul's leadership among the Fremen goes beyond simple survival. It continues with a visionary leadership that transforms his inner agony into a future mission. His dedication to defending and strengthening the Fremen is the pinnacle of sublimation. He transforms his personal fears and doubts about his future into a mission to inspire and raise a whole community, emerging as a symbol of hope and change.

Furthermore, his shrewd moves and crafty methods against enemies demonstrate not just his flexibility but also his capacity to draw on his inner struggles to provide original and inventive answers. His cleverness is more than simply tactical; it is an expression of his capacity to transform strong feelings and uncertainty into plans of action that benefit his people.

Paul's path also emphasizes how intricate sublimation is as a defensive tactic. It's about a deep metamorphosis of the self, not merely about channeling feelings into constructive pursuits. He is proof of the depth and scope of sublimation—from a person troubled by uncertainty to a leader influencing and directing a community.

In the end, Paul's use of sublimation in "Dune" captures a life-changing experience that goes beyond survival expertise. It illustrates how he transforms strong feelings and hardships into a legacy of fortitude, flexibility, and visionary leadership. It also shows the alchemical process of transforming personal troubles into a force for leadership and social transformation.

Discovering the intricacies of Paul Atreides' mental state is made fascinating by delving into his personality using Freudian archeology. This emphasizes how thoroughly "Dune" portrays its subject matter and advocates for more thought and research into the psychological elements of cinematic storytelling.

CONCLUSION

Film characters represent sophisticated psychological elements. This study digs into the complex personality of Paul Atreides, focusing on the ways in which he represents Freudian defense mechanisms in "Dune". This movie has led to discussions on visual, interpretation, and powerful portrayals of the main character, Paul Atreides. Understanding the psychological dimensions of Paul's character is crucial to understanding his reactions and motivations throughout the movie. We aim to present an in-depth exploration of Paul's psyche and its impact on the movie's story. The main tenet in analyzing this movie is using Sigmund Freud's theory of psychoanalysis.

Psychoanalysis in general is a theory that has the benefit of analyzing human psychology based on three components, namely the id, ego, and superego. We analyze the scenes in the movie to uncover the complex depths of his psyche by discovering the Defense Mechanisms in psychoanalytic theory that he implements to deal with the difficulties and conflicts he encounters. According to Freud, Defense Mechanisms are means that take place without conscious effort or awareness. There were four types of Ego Defense Mechanisms found in Paul Atreides as a protagonist in this movie namely, sublimation, projection, denial, and repression.

The first thing that represents Defense Mechanism is manifested in the theory of repression which is the unconscious pushing of sensations, ideas, or memories that are uncomfortable out of conscious awareness. He demonstrates repression by suppressing certain

memories, desires, or feelings to avoid psychological discomfort, which is consistent with Freudian thought. The second is denial which according to Freud is the rejection of disturbing facts. In "Dune", Paul Atreides uses denial as a Defense mechanism when faced with challenging realities, especially regarding his prophetic fate and the intricate social and political environment.

There is also a projection theory that is demonstrated by the interaction. Paul employs projection as a sophisticated psychological defense mechanism to distance himself from inner conflicts, anxieties, and uncertainties. In "Dune", Paul exemplifies Freud's sublimation defense mechanism by channeling his emotional and mental struggles into constructive and socially acceptable endeavors, by transforming anxieties about his future into productive actions. Analyzing Paul Atreides's character from a Freudian perspective in "Dune" reveals the intricacies of his mental condition. This underscores the film's depth in exploring psychological themes and advocates for further discussions and investigations into the psychological elements of cinematic storytelling.

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