

BUSTER MOON PROJECTIONS: HOW CARTOON CHARACTERS ACTIVATE PSYCHOANALYTIC DEFENSE MECHANISMS IN "SING (2016)"

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to examine the projection of the character Buster Moon in the animated film "Sing" (2016) using a psychoanalytic theory approach, especially defense mechanisms. Buster Moon, an optimistic and persistent koala, struggles to save his theater from bankruptcy by holding a singing competition. This study explores how the character reflects and activates defense mechanisms by projection, both within himself and in interactions with other characters. Denial can be seen in his continued disregard for difficult financial realities. Projection is demonstrated through the way he handles personal fears and failures by focusing on the dreams and ambitions of others. Through this analysis, the author reveals how Buster Moon as a cartoon character functions not only as an entertainer, but also as a reflection of human defense mechanisms, providing insight into how animated films can function as a medium for understanding psychological dynamics in life.

Keywords: Film, Projection, Defense Mechanism, Psychoanalysis

INTRODUCTION

Our social lives are characterized by various challenges and stresses which often trigger the use of defense mechanisms to maintain emotional balance. One of the main problems that individuals frequently face in social life is the inability or unwillingness to accept difficult realities, such as financial issues. In real life, many people use denial as a mechanism to avoid stress related to financial issues or work pressure. Projection is another mechanism that frequently arises in social interactions, where individuals transfer their fears, desires, or guilt onto others. If a person believes that the best attack is a strong defense, then he will use his projections extensively (Putra et al., 2023). This phenomenon can be observed in everyday situations when parents project their expectations onto their children or when team leaders shift performance pressure to their team members. In this research, the author took the source from the film "Sing (2016)" which is an interesting representation of how defense mechanisms play a role in individuals' life.

"Sing" is an animated film and offers a unique lens through which to examine human behavior and complex psychological phenomena. Directed by Garth Jennings, it brings to life a variety of anthropomorphic animals, each with different personalities and struggles. Buster Moon is the centerpiece of this ensemble, an eternally optimistic koala who embodies the relentless pursuit of dreams despite numerous setbacks. Buster faces various situations that require him to remain optimistic and enthusiastic even though reality is often not on his side. Buster Moon, with his ever-optimistic attitude, displayed

resistance to the financial reality of his theater's near bankruptcy. This attitude of denial not only protects Buster from deep anxiety but also allows him to remain focused on his efforts to revive his theater. In psychoanalysis, defense mechanisms are known as subconscious strategies that individuals use to protect themselves from anxiety and the harsh realities of life. These mechanisms, first articulated by Sigmund Freud and later expanded by his daughter Anna Freud, include projection, denial, rationalization, and sublimation. Defense mechanisms are important in how individuals navigate social relationships and personal challenges.

Such mechanisms are recognized in Buster Moon, an optimistic koala who owns an old theater that is nearly bankrupt. He remains persistent in pursuing his dream of bringing the venue back to its former glory. With undying enthusiasm, he held a large-scale singing competition to attract public attention. Despite facing various obstacles, including a major mistake in printing a gift on a poster and the collapse of his theater, Buster Moon did not give up. The support of the diverse and talented competition participants, as well as their strong determination, ultimately brought success and happiness to all and saved their beloved theater.

This article aims to explore the application of psychoanalytic theory on Buster Moon's actions and interactions in "Sing" which exemplify various defense mechanisms. Movies are often used in the learning process to overcome the boredom of learning from textbooks (Sukmawati, 2022). By examining Buster Moon's behavior, this article highlights broader social issues such as resilience in the face of failure, the quest for validation, and the complexities of self-esteem. Understanding Buster Moon's psychological defenses offers insight into how individuals, both real and fictional, cope with societal pressures and personal insecurities. The characters' journeys in "Sing" serve as a mirror that reflects the universal human experience of striving for success and recognition amidst adversity. Through this analysis, we aim to uncover the underlying psychological currents that drive Buster Moon and, furthermore, offer a deeper understanding of the human psyche as depicted in the animated film.

As for supporting his research, the author uses an approach to Psychoanalysis initiated by Sigmund Freud regarding the elements of psychoanalysis, namely: projection in defense mechanisms. Previous research regarding the analysis of defense mechanisms was carried out by (Ramadhan & Tawami, 2021) entitled *Reaksi Formasi Pada Karakter Bruce Wayne Dalam Seri Film Batman*. This research explains how Bruce Wayne in the film *Batman Begins* uses reaction formation mechanisms as a defense to reduce impulses. (Respatio, 2018) in the title *Applications of Freudian Psychoanalysis in Rebecca*, analyzes the dreams and hallucinations experienced by the main character Rebecca using Freudian psychoanalysis, showing how the character overcomes her psychological challenges to grow into a strong adult woman. Apart from that, (Wati & Tawami, 2024) with the title *The Psychological Structure of the Main Character in Novel It Ends with Us* by Colleen Hoover, also conducted similar research. This research analyzes the psychological structure of the main character Lily Bloom in the novel *It Ends with Us* by Colleen Hoover, with defense mechanisms that reveal the dominance of the id in Lily Bloom's psychological structure based on Sigmund Freud's theory. From the three previous studies, the identification and strategic analysis of the defense mechanism of Buster Moon's character in the film "Sing (2016)" is still limited.

METHODS

This study uses a qualitative descriptive approach to analyze the defense mechanisms used by the characters in the film "Sing (2016)". This approach allows researchers to explore in-depth and describe in detail the use of defense mechanisms in the context of complex narratives and characters. According to (Moleong, 2007), the qualitative descriptive approach is a research approach where the data collected is in the form of words, pictures and not numbers. This data can be obtained from interviews, field notes, photos, video tapes, personal documentation, notes, or memos and other documentation. This research also uses Freud's theory as a scalpel in exploring the main characters in "Sing (2016)". Freud's defense mechanism discusses several elements.

According to Freud, *Projection* rejects those aspects of themselves that are undesirable or unacceptable and attributes them to others. For example, someone who has aggressive tendencies may feel that everyone around them is aggressive. *Regression* is a return to a previous stage of development in an effort to overcome anxiety or stress. For example, someone facing a highly stressful situation may begin to express childlike behavior. *Denial* is rejecting a reality or truth that hurts or threatens their ego. For example, someone diagnosed with a serious illness may refuse to believe that he or she is sick. *Sublimation* is the redirection of socially unacceptable impulses or desires to activities or accomplishments that are more socially or culturally satisfying. *Intellectualization* is a defense mechanism that uses reasoning to block confrontation with unconscious conflicts and associated emotional distress where thinking is used to avoid feelings.

RESULTS

In this section, the author will explain the results of Buster Moon's projections, providing illustrative examples showing how this defense mechanism shapes his character and impacts the film's overall narrative. This discussion also includes correlations in real life phenomena.

1. Projected Fear of Failure

Buster Moon had a deep fear of failure, especially as his theater was on the verge of bankruptcy. These fears are often projected onto external situations:



Figure 1. Data 1 (Taken from the 2016 film "Sing", duration 1:09:03 – 1:09:40)

In Figure 1, Buster Moon's theater is depicted physically collapsing after the water pool breaks. Unconsciously, Buster Moon projects his own failure to effectively manage the theater onto the external event of the building's collapse. By attributing the theater's physical collapse to external factors beyond his control, Buster Moon shifts his fear and feelings of inadequacy onto something outside of himself. This projection allows him to reduce internal anxiety and stress by placing the blame on external circumstances.

The scene shows how Buster redirects his unwanted thoughts and emotions onto an external object, which is a common characteristic of projection as a defense mechanism. In this particular context, Buster feels inadequate and fearful of failing in his attempts to save the theater. As the theater begins to collapse, the physical destruction becomes a symbolic representation of Buster's internal fear and inadequacy, projected onto the surrounding environment. It effectively portrays how external stress can mirror a person's internal state.

Buster avoids facing his own deficiencies head-on by putting his sentiments of incompetence onto the theater's collapse. He sees the theater's devastation as outside proof of a scenario that he feels is out of his control. He now has a self-generated "reason" for his failure thanks to this projection. It protects him from helplessness or thoughts of inadequacy and lets him keep some semblance of self-esteem.

In reality, projections like this often occur when individuals face difficult or stressful situations. For example, a person may blame a poor work environment for declining work performance, rather than admitting to one's own personal problems or shortcomings. This mechanism helps individuals to maintain their self-esteem and avoid feelings of inadequacy or helplessness. Overall, the scene in Figure 1 clearly illustrates how Buster Moon uses projection to overcome his fear and inadequacy. This suggests that cartoon characters can serve as a mirror for human psychological dynamics, showing how we all, both consciously and unconsciously, use defense mechanisms to deal with life's challenges.

2. Projection of Ambition onto Competition Participants

Buster Moon often projects his ambitions and hopes for success onto the participants of the singing competition he organizes:



Figure 2. Data 2 (Taken from the film "Sing" 2016, duration 1:02:01 – 1:02:15)

In Figure 2, Buster Moon provides excessive encouragement to one of the participants, Ash. This scene provides an insightful portrayal of how Buster Moon employs projection as a defense mechanism to cope with his own disappointments and unfulfilled dreams. His action of encouragement portrays that by seeing other success as an extension of his own. He views their potential and achievements as reflections of himself, which provides personal satisfaction and validation. However, in reality, each participant, including Ash, faces their own challenges and has different motivations and struggles.

This scene reflects how individuals often project their hopes and dreams onto others in an attempt to fulfill personal unmet desires. In social life, this can be seen when parents expect their children to achieve things they themselves failed to achieve, or when team leaders place high expectations on team members to reach goals they themselves could not accomplish. Such projections help Buster Moon stay motivated and feel relevant despite facing failures in his own endeavors. However, this also places undue pressure on participants like Ash, who have to face not only their personal challenges but also the expectations projected by Buster Moon.

Overall, the scene in Figure 2 highlights on the dynamics of projection as a defense mechanism employed by Buster Moon to cope with his disappointments and unfulfilled dreams. It emphasizes that animated characters, like Buster Moon, can serve as reflections of complex psychological mechanisms present in real-life situations. Through projecting his own unfulfilled hopes and dreams onto the successes of others, Buster attempts to manage his own emotional state. However, it is crucial to recognize the potential impact of these projections on participants like Ash, who not only face their own challenges but also bear the weight of the expectations projected onto them by Buster.

3. Projection of Denial of Financial Reality

Buster often refuses to face the grim financial reality of his theater and projects excessive optimism to avoid anxiety:



Figure 3. Data 3 (Taken from the film "Sing" 2016, duration 24:17 – 24:35)

In Figure 3, this particular scene showcases how Buster Moon utilizes denial and projection as defense mechanisms to cope with the anxiety surrounding his theater's serious financial problems. Denial, as a defense mechanism, involves refusing to

acknowledge or accept a painful or threatening reality. In this scene, Buster Moon projects his denial of the financial issues plaguing his theater by maintaining an overly optimistic attitude. By deceiving himself and continuously promising that everything will be okay, he diverts his anxiety about bankruptcy into an unrealistic belief that the situation will somehow resolve itself. Buster Moon adamantly refuses to confront the harsh reality and replaces it with an unwavering optimistic outlook. To escape the unease that comes with admitting the reality of his situation, Buster has decided to downplay the seriousness of his financial difficulties. He believes that by continuing to display a positive attitude and encouraging the participants, the financial problems he faces will resolve themselves. This excessive optimism provides Buster Moon with a sense of control and false hope, allowing him to avoid the fear and despair he should be facing.

In real life, individuals often employ denial mechanisms when confronted with difficult circumstances, such as financial problems, serious illnesses, or relationship crises. By denying the existence or severity of these challenges, they shield themselves from the deep anxiety and distress that would otherwise accompany them. This protective mechanism, however, can delay actions that need to be taken, and potentially cause more significant problems.

Thus, the scene in Figure 3 illustrates how Buster Moon's denial and projection can be used to cope with his anxiety but also highlights the dangers of ignoring existing reality. This emphasizes the complexity of psychological defense mechanisms which can manifest in various forms in everyday life in actual reality, so that these defense mechanisms can be used when you encounter a bitter reality which can be used as motivation to avoid feeling sad and down.

4. Projection of the Need for Validation

Buster Moon needs validation for his efforts to save the theater, and he often projects this need into his relationships with other characters:



Figure 4. Data 4 (Taken from the film "Sing" 2016, duration 09:39 – 10:02)

In Figure 4, there is a scene where Buster Moon seeks support from his friend, Eddie, despite Eddie being skeptical about the success of Buster's singing competition. In this situation, Buster Moon projects his deep need for recognition and support into his hopes for Eddie. Buster hopes that by gaining Eddie's support, he can confirm the value

and importance of his own efforts. This attitude shows how Buster not only seeks external validation but also tries to overcome his uncertainties and fears through recognition from someone he considers important.

The need for recognition from others reflects Buster's internal uncertainty about the success of his efforts. This projection allows Buster Moon to maintain motivation and a sense of appreciation, even in the face of skepticism and tough challenges. By projecting his desires onto Eddie, Buster attempts to transform his anxieties and fears into the belief that his efforts are truly worthwhile and worth doing. This also highlights his tendency to seek validation and support from those closest to him to overcome feelings of insecurity and strengthen his self-confidence. Buster Moon's reliance on Eddie's approval not only underscores his need for recognition but also reflects how personal relationships can play a major role in maintaining a person's belief in their goals.

5. Projection of Fear of Rejection

Buster fears being rejected by society and his community, especially when he tries to gain financial and moral support for his theater:



Figure 5. Data 5 (Taken from the film "Sing" 2016, duration 49:28 – 50:19)

In Figure 5, this showcases how Buster Moon employs projection as a defense mechanism to cope with his fear of rejection and avoid feelings of inadequacy. However, Nana rejects Buster's request because she does not want her reputation to be diminished by his show. In this situation, Buster projects his fear of rejection onto external reasons. He believes that Nana rejects his sponsorship request because others do not understand his vision or do not care enough about the arts, rather than acknowledging that there may be flaws in his approach.

This projection shows how Buster Moon uses defense mechanisms to avoid feelings of inadequacy and personal rejection. By shifting the blame to others' lack of understanding or appreciation of his vision, Buster Moon avoids painful introspection about the weaknesses or flaws in his plan. This reflects a psychological dynamic often seen in real life, where individuals find it easier to blame external factors rather than face the possibility that the real problem lies in their approach or effort. By making this projection, Buster Moon can maintain his self-esteem and belief in his vision, even though

he might need to improve his strategy or develop a more effective approach to achieve his goals.

This scene also reveals how fear of rejection can influence a person's perception of situations and others. Rather than viewing feedback as an opportunity to learn and grow, Buster Moon interpreted it as a sign that others failed to understand or appreciate his effort. This shows how the projection mechanism can function as a temporary shield of emotional protection, helping individuals avoid unpleasant truths or criticism. However, while these defense mechanisms may only provide short-term comfort, they can also hinder the true progress and self-improvement necessary for long-term success. By blaming or misunderstanding others, Buster Moon delays facing constructive changes that could ultimately improve his personal development and actually lead to more meaningful accomplishments.

6. Projection of Emotional Dependence on Father Figure

Buster Moon has a strong relationship with the memory of his father, who is the main inspiration behind his efforts to save the theater. This emotional dependence is often projected in his efforts to preserve his father's legacy:



Figure 6. Data 6 (Taken from the film "Sing" 2016, duration 23:38 – 23:59)

In Figure 6, Buster Moon recalls his father's advice and support when facing challenges. In this scene, Buster Moon projects his desire to meet his father's expectations and continue that legacy, transferring his emotional pressure to the ideal image of his father. By recalling his father's advice, Buster Moon not only seeks strength and motivation but also tries to prove that he is capable of continuing his father's dream, reflecting deep personal aspirations and pressures.

This projection shows how Buster Moon uses defense mechanisms to cope with the emotional pressure and expectations he feels from his father. By focusing on the idealization of his father, Buster transfers his internal anxiety and uncertainty to an external figure full of hope and support. People who are in a state of codependency lack expression in various situations because they do not pay attention to themselves (Mostafa et al., 2021). This is Buster's way of staying motivated and maintaining his spirit despite facing many challenges and obstacles in his efforts to save the theater. The ideal father

figure becomes a symbolic source of strength that helps Buster Moon overcome fear and failure.

Thus, the scene in Figure 6 reveals the complex psychological dynamics experienced by Buster Moon in his efforts to meet his father's expectations. It illustrates how projections of an ideal figure can function as a source of motivation as well as significant emotional pressure. This mechanism helps Buster to keep striving and working hard while at the same time diverting attention from his own uncertainties and doubts.

DISCUSSION

The results above highlight how Buster Moon, a seemingly simple animated character, embodies complex psychological behavior. The use of projection and denial as defense mechanisms has many functions:

a) **Coping with Stress:**

Buster's projection allows him to let out his internal anxieties, reducing his emotional burden. For example, by projecting his fear of failure onto events beyond his control, Buster managed to maintain a sense of self-efficacy, even when faced with significant setbacks.

b) **Maintaining Motivation:**

His projection of ambition to the competition participants illustrates how Buster Moon uses this mechanism to stay motivated. By seeing their potential success as an extension of his own success, he maintained his enthusiasm, even when the reality of the situation was getting worse.

c) **Protecting Self-Esteem:**

Buster Moon's denial of the financial reality of his theater, coupled with his projections to protect his pride. This allows him to remain hopeful and persistent, even in the face of overwhelming odds. However, this resistance also inhibits realistic problem solving, and represents both a benefit and a threat to one's psychological defenses.

d) **Seeking Validation and Support:**

His projections regarding the need for validation in his life and relationships, especially with Eddie, his best friend, regarding his internal uncertainty. Buster's reliance on external support reveals his vulnerability and his need for reassurance, highlighting the interplay between external relationships and internal psychological states.

e) **Dealing with Rejection:**

Projecting his fear of rejection onto external factors allows Buster Moon to avoid confrontation with his perceived shortcomings, thereby maintaining his self-esteem. This mechanism, while protective, can also inhibit growth and adaptation, as it shifts responsibility away from Buster Moon himself.

f) **Emotional Dependence and Legacy:**

Finally, Buster's projection of emotional dependence on his father's legacy suggests a deep connection between past and present motivations. These projections help Buster Moon remain resilient in the face of it all but also add to the emotional stress, as he attempts to realize idealized memories.

This discussion shows how the defense mechanisms used by Buster Moon reflect broader human psychological dynamics, even though they are depicted in animated characters. Through this lens, "Sing" (2016) offers a narrative that resonates with real-life experiences, making it not only entertaining but also psychologically insightful into life.

CONCLUSION

An analysis of Buster Moon's use of defense mechanisms in the film "Sing" (2016) offers an in-depth exploration of how animated characters can be a reflection of human psychological complexity. Through the framework of psychoanalytic theory, specifically focusing on projection, Buster Moon emerges as a character who navigates personal difficulties and challenges by projecting his fears, ambitions, and insecurities onto external entities and relationships. His relentless optimism amidst financial hardship, illustrated through denial and projection, not only protected him from overwhelming anxiety but also confirmed his resilience and determination to revive his theater. This study not only highlights the narrative depth of animated storytelling but also sheds light on the broader human experience of coping mechanisms and interpersonal dynamics. By dissecting Buster Moon's psychological strategies, this research provides valuable insight into how individuals manage stress and maintain hope in the face of uncertainty, demonstrating the relevance of psychoanalytic concepts in understanding fictional characters' real-life behavior.

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