

Analysis of Amir's Behavioral Motivation in *The Kite Runner* from Freud's Psychological Defense Mechanism Theory

Chen Qin^a, Yue Zheng^b

Guangzhou Institute of Science and Technology, Guangzhou 510540, China

^aqinchen0522@qq.com, ^b2537529709@qq.com

Abstract

This paper undertakes a comprehensive analysis of Amir's behavioral motivations within the rich narrative tapestry of Khaled Hosseini's critically acclaimed novel, *The Kite Runner*. Drawing upon Sigmund Freud's groundbreaking psychological defense mechanism theory, the study delves into the intricate psychological workings that drive Amir's actions and decisions. By meticulously examining Freud's theory and its various defense mechanisms, the paper uncovers the hidden motivations and emotional struggles that underpin Amir's character development. The literature review section meticulously surveys the vast array of existing research on Freud's theory and *The Kite Runner*, including both international and domestic scholarly contributions. This synthesis of diverse perspectives positions the current study as a valuable contribution to the ongoing academic discourse, offering fresh insights into the intersection of psychology and literature. The analysis focuses on denial and projection, illustrating how Amir employs these as coping strategies. Through close textual analysis, the paper reveals how Amir's defenses shape his actions and emotions. This nuanced understanding highlights the profound impact of psychological factors on human behavior. Ultimately, this paper contributes to a deeper appreciation of Amir's character and the intricate web of psychological motivations that inform his choices and actions. It demonstrates the enduring relevance of Freud's psychological defense mechanism theory in elucidating the complexities of human behavior and offers valuable insights for readers and scholars alike.

Keywords

Freud's Psychological Defense Mechanism Theory; *The Kite Runner*; Behavioral Motivation.

1. Introduction

The Kite Runner, Khaled Hosseini's renowned novel, stands out for its intricate psychological exploration of themes like family, friendship, guilt, betrayal, and growth. Amir, the protagonist, undergoes a journey of emotional turmoil and growth, making him a compelling character for analysis. *The Kite Runner* tells the story of Amir, a young Afghan man of noble lineage, who struggles with the torment of having betrayed his half-brother, Hassan. Hosseini's global readership has responded with overwhelming gratitude for his having written *The Kite Runner* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns* on his website[1]. The narrative is set against the turbulent backdrop of Afghanistan's history, characterized by a violent communist takeover, the subsequent invasion by the Soviet Union, a mass migration of refugees, the ascendancy of the Taliban regime, and the pivotal occurrences on September 11, 2001.

Upon its release, *The Kite Runner* received a warm reception and garnered praise from readers worldwide. It ascended to international bestseller status and attained the status of a beloved classic. Isabel Allende, in the preface of *The Kite Runner*, beautifully encapsulates the novel's

essence, stating that it weaves together “all the profound themes of literature and life: love, honor, guilt, fear, and redemption.” This paper aims to delve deeper into Amir’s behavioral motivation by analyzing his actions and decisions through the lens of Freud’s psychological defense mechanism theory. Through this exploration of the psychological underpinnings of Amir’s choices, a more profound understanding of his character and the resonating themes throughout *The Kite Runner* is attained.

2. Integrated Review: Freud’s Psychological Defense Mechanism Theory and *The Kite Runner*

2.1. Freud’s Psychological Defense Mechanism Theory

Sigmund Freud’s theory of defense mechanisms reveals how people unconsciously cope with uncomfortable realities and emotional distress. These mechanisms, including denial and projection, act as safeguards against anxiety, guilt, and pain. How individuals employ these strategies in both daily and exceptional situations greatly affects their handling of stressful events and overall well-being.

2.2. The Composition of Freud’s Psychological Defense Mechanism Theory

Sigmund Freud introduced psychological defense mechanisms as unconscious coping strategies against anxiety and conflict. These mechanisms include denial and projection. Denial evades painful truths, projection externalizes conflicts. Understanding these mechanisms offers insights into personal and others’ behaviors, facilitating emotional navigation.

2.3. Literature Review on *The Kite Runner*

2.3.1. Current Research Abroad

Since its publication, *The Kite Runner* has garnered diverse interpretations from both critics and readers, who have approached it through various theoretical frameworks. Some critics have explored the ethical dimensions of this novel, interpreting *The Kite Runner* as an allegory for global ethics. In *To be good (again): The Kite Runner as an allegory of global ethics*, David Jefferess delves into the ethical principles within the novel[4]. Drawing from Appiah’s cosmopolitanism, Mamdani’s analysis of distinctions between “good Muslim” and “bad Muslim”, and Butler’s theory of human interdependence, Jefferess argues that *The Kite Runner* signifies a “shift away from the dominance of race and nation as the primary markers of political community and identity towards the concept of the ‘modern’ as the framework for defining the human experience.”

Other critics have examined the novel through the lens of New Historicism, with a particular focus on how Hosseini reinterprets Afghanistan’s historical narrative through the interaction between textual and historical elements. In his research paper *Power Relations in The Kite Runner: A New Historicist Reading*, Al-Sudeary Mashaal discusses the evolution of power dynamics in Afghanistan[6]. He highlights that “what was once a society primarily reliant on physical strength and valor to structure power dynamics has now evolved to give central importance to discourse as a fundamental source of power.” Consequently, *The Kite Runner* serves as both a re-imagining of Afghan history and a representation of its changing power dynamics.

2.3.2. Current Research at Home

In 2006, Li Jihong rendered *The Kite Runner* into Chinese, thus bringing it to the attention of the Chinese audience. This literary import made an immediate and significant impact on Chinese readers, and as a result, domestic research and studies on the novel have flourished. These studies can be broadly categorized into several key areas, including thematic exploration, comparative literature analysis, narrative techniques, and archetypal interpretations.

Some studies of *The Kite Runner* have involved comparing the novel to other works that share similar themes. For instance, “Cultural Identity of the Third World in the Context of Globalization-Analysis of The Kite Runner” by Li Yan from Northeastern University[5], focuses on the nation’s identity in the background of globalization and the marginalization of the third world countries.

Studies examining the writing techniques employed in *The Kite Runner* focus on narrative strategies and metaphorical patterns. Wang Jianrong from Beijing Jiaotong University published an essay called *An analysis of the Kite Image in The Kite Runner*[7]. In this paper, he asserts that the kite image serves a pivotal narrative role, encompassing a wide array of metaphorical meanings. He delves into the analysis of this kite imagery in the novel, examining it through the lens of national spirit, moral heritage, societal and cultural transformations, as well as ethical considerations. In *Echoed Images and Cultural Metaphors in The Kite Runner*, Huang Ying asserts that Hosseini employs various culturally metaphorical images[3], such as kites, pomegranate trees, slingshots, and harelips, to infuse poetics into his narration. This narrative technique, according to Huang, heightens narrative tension and enriches the characters’ inner lives.

Although a significant amount of research has been conducted on Khaled Hosseini and *The Kite Runner*, the author and his work still lack recognition and appreciation among scholars, both domestically and internationally.

3. Amir’s Behavioral Motivation under of Freud’s Psychological Defense Mechanism

3.1. Denial: A Coping Mechanism and its Behavioral Motivations in Amir

Denial, a widespread coping mechanism, enables individuals to evade confronting uncomfortable realities or painful truths. This avoidance behavior often serves as a protective shield, shielding individuals from the emotional distress and anxiety that such truths might evoke.

The genesis of denial often lies in a desire to maintain a perception of control or stability. Individuals may defer the emotional and psychological burden that negative or unpleasant realities might otherwise impose by refusing to acknowledge them. Denial acts as a psychological buffer, insulating individuals from the pain and discomfort associated with confronting difficult truths.

However, denial, despite its temporary comfort, is not a sustainable long-term coping strategy. In the longer run, it can have profound adverse effects. Firstly, denial can hamper one’s capacity to make informed decisions and take appropriate action, as it blinds individuals to critical information. Secondly, it can foster a sense of isolation and detachment from reality, eroding one’s self-perception and social connections.

To transcend denial as a coping mechanism, individuals must cultivate a disposition towards engaging with uncomfortable truths and painful realities. This necessitates the fostering of emotional resilience and the augmentation of one’s tolerance for discomfort and anxiety. The solicitation of support from others, the engagement in therapeutic processes such as counseling or psychotherapy, and the practice of mindfulness and self-reflection can all contribute towards this endeavor.

In *The Kite Runner*, Amir’s use of denial as a coping mechanism is intricately woven into the fabric of the narrative, influencing his actions and interactions with others. An emotive moment emerges in Khaled Hosseini’s *The Kite Runner* when Amir witnesses Hassan’s assault yet opts to overlook the gravity of the situation. “Hassan milled about the periphery of my life after that. I made sure our paths crossed as little as possible, planned my day that way. Because when he

was around, the oxygen seeped out of the room”[2]. Khaled Hosseini’s profound portrayal of Amir’s defense mechanism highlights how he consciously shirks acknowledging his betrayal, convincing himself of his innocence. This pivotal event becomes a pivotal milestone in Amir’s life, epitomizing the profound impact of denial in shaping his self-perception and relationships with others.

3.2. Projection: A Psychological Defense Mechanism and its Behavioral Motivations in Amir

Projection is a psychological defense mechanism that individuals employ to deflect unwanted traits, emotions, or impulses onto external sources, thereby relieving internal pressure and anxiety. This mechanism involves redirecting negative aspects of oneself onto others or external objects, allowing one to maintain a more positive self-image.

The operation of projection is rooted in distorted self-perception. When confronted with imperfections or undesirable characteristics, individuals often attribute these aspects to external factors, rather than acknowledging them as part of their own selves. This deflection serves to preserve a favorable self-image, avoiding the discomfort and unease associated with self-recognition.

Projection manifests in various forms, often as a subconscious attempt to externalize unwanted aspects of the self. For instance, an individual who lacks honesty with themselves may accuse others of dishonesty. Similarly, someone who harbors inner hostility may perceive hostility in others. These projected behaviors are a manifestation of the individual’s attempt to displace their negative traits or emotions onto external sources.

However, while projection may offer temporary psychological comfort, its long-term effects can be detrimental. Firstly, it can hinder one’s ability to self-reflect and grow, as the individual avoids addressing their own flaws and weaknesses. Secondly, an overreliance on projection can put undue strain on interpersonal relationships, resulting in misunderstandings and conflicts as individuals falsely interpret the behaviors and intentions of others.

To overcome projection as a psychological defense mechanism, individuals must cultivate self-awareness and embrace vulnerability. Through introspection and self-exploration, they can gradually recognize their projection behaviors and develop healthier coping mechanisms. Seeking feedback and opinions from others can also be beneficial in enhancing self-awareness and reducing projection behaviors.

Examining specific narrative instances in *The Kite Runner* reveals the profound impact of projection on Amir’s behavioral motivations. Amir’s psychological landscape in *The Kite Runner* is marked by the defense mechanism of projection, a process in which he attributes his own undesirable qualities and emotions to others. A profound example emerges in the pages of Khaled Hosseini’s narrative, when Amir, weighed down by guilt and shame, transfers his emotions onto Hassan. “I wished he’d give me the punishment I craved, so maybe I’d finally sleep at night. Maybe then things could return to how they used to be between us”[2]. Instead of confronting his internal turmoil directly, he accuses Hassan of theft, transferring his own sense of moral inadequacy onto his loyal friend. This act of projection becomes a pivotal moment, revealing the intricate ways in which Amir attempts to externalize his internal conflicts.

Concurrently, a poignant illustration occurs during the kite-fighting tournament, where Amir, having betrayed Hassan’s trust, witnesses Hassan’s unwavering loyalty. Unable to face the guilt of his betrayal, Amir projects his feelings of guilt and unworthiness onto Hassan, perceiving him as inferior and undeserving of such loyalty. This projection not only shields Amir from confronting the truth of his actions, but also adds layers of complexity to their already strained relationship.

Subsequently, as the narrative unfolds, Amir's projection intensifies, particularly in his interactions with Sohrab, Hassan's son. Amir's behavior is shaped by the lingering echoes of guilt and inadequacy, as he strives to attain redemption through his bond with Sohrab. By projecting his unresolved emotions onto Sohrab, Amir attempts to reconcile with his own internal conflicts.

By delving deep into these narrative threads, the behavioral motivations of projection become evident. Amir's actions and decisions are intricately linked to his efforts to externalize and detach himself from the emotional burdens he bears. This analysis enriches our understanding of Amir's character development and the intricate interplay of defense mechanisms in *The Kite Runner*.

4. Conclusion

The psychological defense mechanism theory, as expounded by Sigmund Freud, offers profound insights into the complexities of Amir's character and his actions in Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*. Freud's theory unravels the intricate web of Amir's thoughts, emotions, and behavioral patterns, revealing why he reacts in certain ways and how he navigates through conflict and trauma.

A pivotal moment in the novel that illustrates Amir's employment of psychological defense mechanisms is the kite-flying incident. Upon witnessing his loyal friend Hassan being savagely assaulted by Assef for defending the kite Amir had secured, Amir opts to remain silent. This cowardice can be traced back to Amir's unconscious use of displacement, where he projects his guilt and shame onto Hassan, blaming him for Amir's own failure to intervene. This psychological defense allows Amir to temporarily alleviate the burden of guilt and self-reflection.

The redemption and development Amir experiences throughout the novel can be construed as a transcendence of his psychological defense mechanisms. Through confronting his past blunders and acknowledging his actions, Amir acquires the ability to cope with his guilt and shame in a more salutary and authentic fashion. This distancing allows him to maintain an emotional barrier, protecting himself from further hurt and pain. However, this distancing also contributed to his alienation and isolation throughout the novel.

Throughout the paper's examination of Amir's behavioral motivation in *The Kite Runner* from Freud's psychological defense mechanism theory, Amir's intricate psychological tapestry is comprehensively unveiled. By carefully applying Freud's defense mechanisms—denial and projection—the paper delves into Amir's actions and reactions within the context of his internal psychological turmoil.

Freud's theory sheds profound insights into Amir's character. Initially, denial provides Amir with a refuge, enabling him to escape the guilt he feels over betraying his friend, Hassan. Projection allows him to externalize his own feelings of inadequacy, projecting them onto others.

As the narrative progresses, Amir's quest for self-knowledge and the gradual revelation of his suppressed memories are observed. This journey, filled with emotional and psychological obstacles, is guided by Freud's theory of psychological defense mechanisms. Amir's behavioral motivations evolve from initial denial and avoidance of his past misdeeds to a more honest and self-aware approach. This evolution signifies Amir's personal growth and underscores the explanatory power of Freud's theory in understanding the complexities of human behavior.

In conclusion, while this paper has demonstrated the relevance and applicability of Freud's psychological defense mechanism theory in interpreting Amir's behavioral motivations in *The Kite Runner*, it also recognizes the limitations of the research due to the brevity of the study period. Future research could build on this foundation, exploring Amir's character and the

themes of the novel from multiple theoretical angles, offering a more rounded and comprehensive understanding of the text and its characters.

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