



## An analysis of defense mechanisms in the album *Vessel* (2013) by Twenty One Pilots

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### ABSTRACT

Mental health disorders have led to an increase and cause of personality problems and suicidal thoughts. Music, as an art form, often serves as a medium through which artists release their negative thoughts, emotions and experiences. In song lyrics, we can see the manifestation of defense mechanisms used by the speaker. As Cramer (2000) states, a defense mechanism is an attempt as a psychological strategy to reduce or avoid adverse circumstances such as conflict, frustration, anxiety, and stress. This study aims to identify what types of defense mechanisms are used by the speaker contained in the lyrics of five Twenty One Pilots songs in the album *Vessel* (2013) titled “Ode To Sleep”, “Migraine”, “Car Radio”, “Guns for Hands” and “Holding On To You”. This research used a qualitative method with the theoretical framework of defense mechanisms by Freud (1936/2018) and Cramer (2015). It was found that several types and the level stages of defense mechanisms used by the speaker in the five songs of Twenty One Pilots album *Vessel* (2013) are as follows: Neurotic defenses: displacement (2), Immature defenses: projection (1), and Mature defenses: suppression (5), altruism (5), sublimation (1), and intellectualization (1). This research provides new insights to readers about the main theme of the album *Vessel* (2013) and the types of defense mechanisms used by the speaker from Twenty One Pilots. This research also confirms that music can be used as a medium to channel negative feelings and anxiety experienced by songwriters as their defense mechanism.

**Keywords:** Defense mechanisms; mental health; song lyrics

### How to cite (in APA 7th edition style):

Ridwan, M. F., & Nafisah, N. (2023). An analysis of defense mechanisms in the album *Vessel* (2013) by Twenty One Pilots. *Passage*, 12(2), 89-104.

### INTRODUCTION

In the 21st century, many people, especially Generation Z, experience psychological trauma and mental health problems. These mental health problems have led to increased personality problems, which can make some people more likely to contemplate or attempt suicide. Generation Z has emerged as a catalyst for increased mental health awareness, especially defense mechanisms. A defense mechanism is one of the many concepts of psychoanalysis theory proposed by Sigmund Freud through his early essential writings. According to Freud S. (1923/2018), within the realm of psychoanalysis, there is a basic framework of personality consisting of three integral elements: the id, superego, and

ego. The id represents instinctive thinking, the superego includes thinking rooted in moral principles and social norms, and the ego serves as the central cognitive force responsible for maintaining the delicate balance between these two influential aspects of the human psyche. This theory was elaborated and refined by Freud's daughter, Anna Freud. Freud A. (1936/2018) elaborates that defense mechanism theory is a psychoanalytic concept centered on the individual ego, which explains the essential role of the ego in adapting and responding to the demands and conflicts inherent to human existence. Supported by Cramer (2000), a person will use defense mechanisms as psychological strategies to

reduce or avoid adverse circumstances such as conflict, frustration, anxiety, and stress.

According to Cramer (2015), the defense mechanism is divided into four levels. The first level is psychotic defenses, such as denial and distortion. The second level is immature defenses, which consist of passive aggression, acting out, dissociation, projection, and autistic fantasy (devaluation, idealization, and splitting). The third level is neurotic (intermediate) defenses, which consist of intellectualization, isolation, repression, reaction formation, displacement, somatization, undoing, and rationalization. The fourth level is mature defenses such as suppression, altruism, humor, and sublimation.

One of the reasons for increasing mental health awareness is that it can be voiced through several media, one of which is through songs or music. People with specific mental health issues find a way to release their suffering by listening to songs with relatable lyrics to their situation and condition. It could be seen from the perspective of the average listener and the songwriter. Music is often used as a medium to express the thoughts of musicians. Usually, musicians focus writing their song lyrics on one particular emotion, such as happiness, anger, sadness, and even depression. However, the lyrics of the songs in the third album of Twenty One Pilots have a unique characteristic. It has a complex and introspective feel that explores various emotional themes. These lyrics often focus on real-life struggles and inner conflicts. These inner conflicts can be analyzed through the psychological theory of defense mechanisms; what is the main theme what types of defense mechanisms are used by the speaker in the album *Vessel* (2013)?

Studies on defense mechanisms in song lyrics are almost nonexistent; many researchers usually focus more on the musicians. Murti (2014), for example, analyzed the defense mechanisms of Adele reflected in Adele's *21* albums based on a psychoanalytic approach. The result of this research is that there are several defense mechanisms used by Adele through her songs in this album. The researcher also investigates several elements of her songs, such as measure (bar), harmony, tempo, verse, pre-chorus, chorus, melody, and

bridge. In addition, most researchers also analyzed the defense mechanisms of characters in a novel. Shrivastwa (2023), for instance, analyzed the defense mechanisms of leading characters in *The Girl on the Train*. The researcher found that the main character, Tom, uses various defense strategies to reduce his anxiety. One of them is ego splitting. Also, Zahrah and Wijayanti (2023) analyzed the self-defense mechanisms of the main character in the novel *Pünktchen und Anton*. The result from this study is that there are seven types of defense mechanisms from the main character of this novel, such as repression, reaction, diversion, regression, sublimation, denial, and rationalization.

There are many studies on the defense mechanisms of people or even fictional characters in novels and movies, but scarcely any have focused on uncovering defense mechanisms in song lyrics. Therefore, the third album, *Vessel* (2013) by Twenty One Pilots, is worth analyzing because the lyrics in their songs tend to use various emotions; thus, the lyrics in these songs can provide new insights to readers about the types of defense mechanisms used by the speaker from Twenty One Pilots. The researcher uses Anna Freud's (1936/2018) framework and Cramer's (2015) to analyze the defense mechanisms. Meanwhile, the psychoanalytic theory of character behavior upheld by Freud S. (1923/2018) serves as a methodological tool for this research.

## METHOD

This study addresses issues of psychology, specifically defense mechanisms in song lyrics. Defense mechanisms in the form of song lyrics opened up unique avenues for understanding the human psyche. Sigmund Freud's comprehensive work on defense mechanisms formed the basis for numerous studies that sought to uncover the intricacies of human behavior, emotions, and defense mechanisms. The influence of Freud A. (1936/2018), who revolutionized the theory of defense mechanisms, and further research conducted by Cramer (2015) helped guide this research. In addition, the selection of data sources was done carefully and in-depth by analyzing song lyrics from the album *Vessel* (2013) by Twenty One Pilots. Twenty One Pilots is a famous duo group band that

has a unique style and a new buzz through their music by combining elements of pop, rock, hip-hop, and electronic music. Formed in 2009, the band has gained significantly increased popularity year after year. The members of Twenty One Pilots are Tyler Joseph as vocalist and Josh Dun as drummer. Twenty One Pilots' uniqueness can be seen from their genre-blending, which combines various genres into fresh music. The themes presented in the lyrics of their songs tend to be meaningfully introspective, addressing mental health issues, existential questions, and self-discovery. The album *Vessel* (2013) has a total of 12 tracks. However, I only analyzed five songs that are considered to have the type of defense mechanism in their lyrics. The songs' titles are "Ode To Sleep", "Migraine", "Car Radio", "Guns for Hands" and "Holding On To You". The use of song lyrics as a data source was not only innovative but also provided a unique window into the exploration of defense mechanisms in everyday life, as they were often expressed in honest and emotional ways through music.

This research used a descriptive qualitative method, as stated by Creswell & Poth (2016). Descriptive qualitative research was a methodology utilized to gain a thorough understanding of the experiences faced by the subjects under scrutiny, primarily communicated through spoken or written expressions. This research relied heavily on textual information as its primary data source (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The strength of this method lies in its ability to provide a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under study. In this case, it allowed the researcher to investigate the lyrical narratives of Twenty One Pilots songs, carefully examining the texts to reveal layers of complex defense mechanisms. This approach was particularly suited to understanding the nuances of defense mechanisms, as these psychological processes were indirectly intertwined with emotions, experiences, and personal narratives. The data collection process was divided into two distinct important phases: searching and analyzing. The search phase was a crucial first step, which involved listening attentively while reading the lyrics. The researcher immersed himself in the lyrical narrative, identifying instances where defense mechanisms were manifested by the speaker.

This careful approach ensured that nothing was overlooked, and the full scope of defense mechanisms in the song lyrics could be revealed. After the searching phase, the analysis phase continued with the same diligence. The researcher undertook a systematic process of identifying and categorizing defense mechanisms, drawing on the psychological theories already mentioned to strengthen the classifications already found. This step provided a structured framework for understanding the observed phenomenon and also added a layer of depth to the analysis, linking the content of the song lyrics to the theory of defense mechanisms. Finally, the interpretation stage was conducted to explain the interaction between song lyrics and defense mechanisms, providing insights into how the speaker used these defense mechanisms to navigate the complexities of life, as expressed through the album *Vessel* (2013).

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

As mentioned earlier, this study aims to analyze the types of defense mechanisms in the album *Vessel* (2013) by Twenty One Pilots using Freud's (1936/2018) and Cramer's (2015) theories. There are five lyrics to analyze as the data: "Ode To Sleep", "Migraine", "Car Radio", "Guns for Hands" and "Holding On To You". Each lyric of these songs is analyzed one by one to reveal what defense mechanisms in the *Vessel* (2013) album are used by the speaker.

The issue of self-reflection and inner struggle often arise at night which causes many people to suffer from insomnia is raised as the theme of the song entitled "Ode to Sleep" from Twenty One Pilots (see Appendix A). The lyrics in this song delve deeper into the complexity of thoughts in mind, or the challenge of finding calm and peace amidst the turmoil of the existentially questioning thoughts. The lyrics also indirectly explain the idea of finding purpose and meaning in life when one experiences insomnia caused by heavy thoughts that plague them. In this song, there are several defense mechanisms used by the speaker:

### Suppression

Suppression is a conscious process of blocking or pushing the unwanted thoughts, memories, or emotions out of awareness (Freud, 1936/2018). There are two suppressions used by the speaker in this song:

I'll stay awake 'cause the dark's not taking prisoners tonight

This is the first line of the pre-chorus in this song. It is indicated as a suppression because the speaker consciously blocked the unwanted negative thoughts that he faced by saying "I'll stay awake" to confront or overcome his inner demons at night. The speaker always tries to fight the negative thoughts; thus, the speaker sees that the negative thoughts are demons that exist in his mind.

Why am I not scared in the morning?  
I don't hear those voices calling  
I must have kicked them out, I must have kicked them out

These are the continuous lines from the pre-chorus in this song. These lines also indicate a suppression. When the morning comes, the speaker feels calmer and consciously pushes down the unwanted negative thoughts as he states "I don't hear those voices calling". The phrase 'the voices' here refers to the negative voices in his mind that are always inevitably bothering him, which are referred to as his inner demons.

The second song, "Migraine", has lyrics that reveal the speaker's feelings of depression. It can be seen in one of the lines in the lyrics "Waging my wars behind my face and above my throat" (see Appendix B). Physically, the brain is behind the face and above the throat, this is where the speaker feels a sense of imprisonment. The word "wars" here means struggle, where he struggles with his depression. Migraine is generally a common occurrence and experienced by many people, and it becomes an alarm to show that something is wrong within us. Therefore, the word "Migraine" is a metaphor in which the speaker wants us to understand how migraines occur and be able to deal with them properly. The word "Migraine" is also a metaphor used to convey the intensity and persistence of this internal

battle. Throughout the lyrics of this song, there are several defense mechanisms used by the speaker as follows:

### **Displacement**

Displacement is the process of moving the negative feelings experienced by a person; this can refer to objects or people (Freud, 1936/2018). There is one displacement used by the speaker in this song:

I've got a migraine  
And my pain will range from up, down, and sideways  
Thank God it's Friday 'cause Fridays will always be better than Sundays  
'Cause Sundays are my suicide days  
I don't know why they always seem so dismal

These lines are the first verse of this song. The first and second lines describe the speaker's depression which makes him feel like he is suffocating from the pain that he feels. Lines three through five explain that he hates Sundays. In Christianity, Sunday is the day when they go to church to pray and ask God for forgiveness. When asking God for forgiveness, the speaker basically 'kill' the part of himself that has sinned. Therefore, the speaker describes that Sunday is a day when he will kill part of himself who has sinned to serve his God. This shows displacement as a defense mechanism that he uses because he displaced or acted out his negative feelings described by migraine pain to Sunday when he felt most suicidal.

### **Suppression**

As Freud (1936/2018) states, suppression is consciously choosing to block the negative feelings or ideas that are undesirable. There are two suppressions used by the speaker in this song:

'Cause sometimes to stay alive, you gotta kill your mind

This is the last line of the second verse in this song. This line is a suppression because the speaker indicates consciously that the way he stays sane and does his daily life 'to stay alive' is by eliminating his negative thoughts by 'killing his mind' temporarily.

And I will say that we should take a day to  
break away  
From all the pain our brain has made, the  
game is not played alone

These two lines are the bridge of this song. These two lines also show that the speaker uses suppression as his defense mechanism from the pain or anxiety he feels by 'resting his mind' for a while so that he could live his day sanely.

The third song, "Car Radio", also tells of his experience when he lost his car radio. The song recounts a time when he lost his car radio which caused discomfort to his mental health. In this song, the speaker expresses that when we are faced with deep solitude, our thoughts can cause an overwhelming sense of isolation and existential angst (see Appendix C). The song depicts the struggle to find inner meaning and distraction when inner sources of comfort are suddenly taken away. There are several defense mechanisms used by the speaker in this song:

### **Sublimation**

Sublimation is a highly effective defense mechanism as it attempts to redirect negative feelings or impulses into positive ones. Defense mechanisms can have a healthy impact depending on the root cause and frequency of occurrence (Bailey & Pico, 2021; Tyson, 2002). The speaker uses one sublimation in this song:

I have these thoughts so often, I ought  
To replace that slot with what I once bought  
'Cause somebody stole my car radio  
And now I just sit in silence

These lines are the refrain part of this song. These lines show the speaker uses sublimation as his defense mechanism. He feels peaceful when listening to his car radio because his negative thoughts were distracted, now that his radio has been stolen, he feels quiet and his negative thoughts take over again. He has lost his car radio which is a tool to distract his inner demons, so he thinks of replacing the radio with the item he has bought. This is a depiction of sublimation as he tries to divert his negative thoughts to something positive by replacing the radio.

### **Displacement**

Moving the unwanted negative thoughts or ideas from one object to another is a displacement behavior. The speaker also use displacement in this song:

I hate this car that I'm driving, there's no  
hiding for me

This is the fifth line of the first verse in this song. The speaker uses displacement as his defense mechanism in this line. The speaker displaced his anger from his lost radio to the car that he is driving by stating 'I hate this car that I'm driving'.

### **Suppression**

The process of pushing down the negative thoughts or ideas with a conscious mind is called suppression. The speaker also uses suppression in this song:

Oh my, too deep, please stop thinking

This is the seventh line of the second verse in this song. This line is considered as a suppression because the speaker consciously tried to suppress or push down his unwanted emotional thoughts or ideas by saying 'please stop thinking' over and over again in his song.

### **Intellectualization**

Intellectualization is a defense mechanism that tends to focus the mind on facts and logic to enable a person to assert control over and reduce unpleasant emotions associated with the events they are experiencing. A simple example of this defense mechanism is when someone loses a loved one, instead of feeling sad and depressed, this person focuses on facts and logic such as arranging the funeral, focusing on the details of the expenses, etc. The speaker uses intellectualization in this song:

And there's faith and there's sleep  
We need to pick one, please, because  
Faith is to be awake and to be awake is for  
us to think  
And for us to think is to be alive  
And I will try with every rhyme  
To come across like I am dying  
To let you know you need to try to think

These are the last lines of the second verse in this song. Instead of feeling deeper anxiety and not wanting to get out of it, the speaker tries to get out by speaking facts, logic, and analysis to avoid confrontation with the emotional or affective components of the problem he is facing. By emphasizing the intellectual aspect of a situation, the speaker was able to create psychological distance from their emotions, which could temporarily reduce anxiety or distress.

Like other songs from *Twenty One Pilots*, the fourth song entitled "Guns for Hands" also addresses the issue of mental health, specifically focusing on the mental struggles and emotional pain faced by individuals. The lyrics of the song tend to convey empathetic, supportive messages that are shown as a way to reach out to those experiencing mental health issues, such as self-harm or suicidal thoughts (see Appendix D). Throughout the lyrics, "Guns for Hands" is a metaphor for the idea of replacing 'dangerous tools' such as 'guns' with 'hands' which means comfort, help, or assistance. The song has had a far-reaching impact in encouraging listeners to raise mental health awareness and to help people overcome their difficult times. In this song, the speaker also uses several defense mechanisms as follows:

### Projection

To prevent unconsciously realizing unwanted traits or impulses in oneself, one uses projection, where one sees unwanted traits or impulses in others (Baumeister, Dale, & Sommer, 1998). The speaker uses projection as the defense mechanism in this song:

I know what you think in the morning  
When the sun shines on the ground  
And shows what you have done  
It shows where your mind has gone  
And you swear to your parents  
That it will never happen again  
I know, I know-ow-ow  
What that means, I know-ow-ow-ow-ow  
That you all have guns  
And you never put the safety on  
And you all have plans  
To take it, to take it, don't take it, take it, take it

These are the lines of the first verse in this song. The speaker is depressed and prone to

thoughts of self-harm as mentioned in "That you all have guns" which can be interpreted as a tool for self-harm. In the initial lyrics, he seems to accuse others, like parents, of feeling negative thoughts; yet we can infer that he is experiencing them by referring to the line "I know what that means". This is a form of defense mechanism called projection, where the speaker projects the negative thoughts that he experiences onto others or his audience.

### Altruism

Freud (1936/2018) stated that reserved and neurotically driven individuals are able to manifest altruistic behavior in doing good for others' well-being, this defense mechanism is called altruism. The speaker uses three altruisms in this song:

Let's take this a second at a time  
Let's take this one song, this one rhyme  
Together, let's breathe  
Together, to the beat

These lines are the first verse of this song. The speaker demonstrated altruistic actions by declaring an invitation to keep striving, seeking meaning, and serenity in life by saying these lyrical lines.

But there's hope out the window  
So that's where we'll go  
Let's go outside and all join hands

Altruistic behavior can be seen by its main characteristic, a genuine concern for the welfare of others. These are the continuing lines of the first verse in this song. Referring to these lines of the lyrics, the speaker shows that he cares about the welfare of others and speaks out against giving up on life. He says that there's hope out there, so it is better to go through this together.

The solution is, I see a whole room of these mutant kids  
Fused at the wrist, I simply tell them they should shoot at this  
Simply suggest my chest and this confused music  
It's obviously best for them to turn their guns to a fist

These are the seventh lines of the bridge in this song. The first two lines show that the

speaker can see the struggles of those who experience anxiety and depression. In the next two lines, the speaker advises these people not to hurt themselves, which is referred to as 'guns', but rather turn it into a 'fist' which means to fight the anxiety or depression they are facing. The line "Simply suggest my chest and this confused music" has a metaphorical meaning that he hopes his music can create a coping mechanism to divert bad thoughts and energy from self-harm into something less destructive.

Moving on to the last song entitled "Holding On To You", this song shows a sense of self-discovery and the importance of meaningful relationships. The lyrics in this song tend to convey the message of holding on to a relationship which can be a source of support during difficult times (see Appendix E). The sense of determination to overcome obstacles and the recognition of the importance of human relationships in providing support and help to one another is portrayed throughout the lyrics. Like the other songs in the album *Vessel* (2013), this song also raises the issue of inner struggle in dealing with internal conflicts, the journey of self-discovery, and the purpose in life. There are several types of defense mechanisms used by the speaker in this song:

### Altruism

Behavior or attitudes characterized by concern for the well-being of others is a defense mechanism referred to as altruism. The speaker also uses two altruisms in this song:

And the windowsill looks really nice, right?  
You think twice about your life, it probably happens at night, right?  
Fight it, take the pain, ignite it

These lines can be found in the second verse of this song. As described earlier, showing empathy towards someone is one of the altruistic behaviors, therefore, these lines are the form of altruism as the speaker's defense mechanism. Referring to the line "And the window sill looks really nice, right?", the speaker mentions that the outside world is not as scary as we think. When unwanted bad thoughts come to haunt us at night, he advises us to fight them by saying "Fight it, take the pain, ignite it".

Lean with it, rock with it, when we gonna stop with it?

Lyrics that mean nothin', we were gifted with thought

Is it time to move our feet, to an introspective beat?

It ain't the speakers that bump hearts, it's our hearts that make the beat

These lines are the breakdown lyrics of this song. These lines are also a form of altruism from the speaker. The speaker strives to encourage anyone suffering from anxiety, depression, or other mental health issues to dance and have fun with his songs by saying these lines. The speaker also calls for our minds to have full control over ourselves by stating "we were gifted with thought" and "it's our hearts that make the beat". He empathizes with his audience that they can healthily control their minds and live life with rhythm in their hearts.

After analyzing the five Twenty One Pilots songs in the album *Vessel* (2013), the researcher found 15 data on defense mechanisms. Of the 15 data, there are six types of defense mechanisms used by the speaker. Suppression and altruism are defense mechanisms that are often used by the speaker, which are obtained from five data each. The second defense mechanism that is often used by the speaker is displacement which is obtained from two data. Lastly, projection, sublimation, and intellectualization are the less used defense mechanisms, which is obtained from one data each.

According to Freud A. (1936/2018), defense mechanisms in psychology are mechanisms of the mind that describe a variety of cognitive strategies used by the ego to regulate and manage psychological distress. These mechanisms that occur in the mind serve as psychological tools to block or reduce the sense of negative thoughts, emotions, and memories that cause anxiety in the conscious mind. Establishing protective boundaries around the subconscious and protecting the mind from unwanted intrusions is the primary goal of defense mechanisms for mental health well-being. The use of defense mechanisms is to enable individuals to function in the face of internal conflict or external stressors. As posited by

Cramer (2000) and Tyson (2006), defense mechanisms play a crucial role in helping a person to be able to feel comfortable in an unhealthy or hostile environment that appears in the conscious mind.

There are four levels of defense mechanisms: psychotic defense, immature defense, neurotic defense, and mature defense (Cramer, 2015). Referring to the data obtained from this analysis, there are six types of defense mechanisms used by the speaker in the five songs from Twenty One Pilots in the album *Vessel* (2013). The speaker mostly uses suppression and altruism, which obtained five data each. Suppression and altruism are types of defense mechanisms found at the mature defense level. The speaker also use displacement, which gets two data. Unlike suppression and altruism, displacement is a type of defense mechanism that is at the neurotic defense level. At the immature defense level, the speaker use projection which obtains one data. Finally, speakers use sublimation and intellectualization which get one data each. It can be concluded that the level stages used by the speaker in the five songs of Twenty One Pilots album *Vessel* (2013) are as follows: Neurotic defenses: displacement (2), Immature defenses: projection (1), and Mature defenses: suppression (5), altruism (5), sublimation (1), and intellectualization (1).

## DISCUSSION

The findings from the five songs above confirm that the main themes of Twenty One Pilots' songs in their music are mental health, inner struggles, self-doubt, and the search for meaning and purpose in life. Twenty One Pilots often explores personal issues such as emotions, hope, resilience, and the idea of not giving up in life. In addition, the researcher found similarities and differences between this study and the other studies. Shrivastwa (2023), for example, similarly analyzed defense mechanisms. However, the subject in this research is the main character in the novel *The Girl on the Train*. Furthermore, the researcher found differences in the findings of this study. Shrivastwa (2023) found that repression and denial are defense mechanisms that are often used by Tom. In contrast to this research, the

researcher did not find repression and denial used by speakers as depicted in Twenty One Pilots' songs in the album *Vessel* (2013). Zahrah and Wijayanti (2023) also analyzed the main character's self-defense mechanism, however, in the novel *Pünktchen und Anton*. The result of the study shows that the main characters mostly use self-defense mechanisms in the form of reaction formation. In contrast to this research, the researcher did not find the reaction and formation used by speakers as depicted in Twenty One Pilots' songs. Significant differences can be seen when comparing this research with these two studies. Both studies examined defense mechanisms from the main characters in a novel, while this study focuses more on analyzing defense mechanisms used by the speaker in song lyrics.

After the researcher succeeded in finding several defense mechanisms used by the speaker in the lyrics of five Twenty One Pilots songs, the researcher concluded that this research had brought a new perspective on the function of music. Not only to convey ideas or works that can be enjoyed by listeners, music can be used as a medium to channel negative feelings and anxiety experienced by songwriters as their defense mechanism. Blacking (1995) states, "Music serves to improve the quality of human relationships and individual experiences in some way; its structures reflect patterns of human relations, and the value of a piece of music as music is inseparable from its value as an expression of human experience.". These five Twenty One Pilots songs are one of many examples of other songs out there. Channeling negative feelings into a better activity is a defense mechanism called sublimation. So, it can be concluded that the speaker had implemented a healthy sublimation defense mechanism method where the speaker channeled the negative feelings that he experienced with a more useful activity, writing song lyrics.

## CONCLUSION

This study has analyzed defense mechanisms in five songs of the lyrics from the album *Vessel* (2013) by Twenty One Pilots. Based on the findings and discussion, this study identified six types of defense mechanisms used by the speaker: suppression, altruism,



displacement, projection, and sublimation. The most often defense mechanisms used by the speaker are suppression and altruism. Meanwhile, displacement, projection, and sublimation are the less used. Referring to the level of defense mechanisms theory by Cramer (2015), the speaker often uses defense mechanisms at the mature defense level: suppression and altruism. The speaker uses music as a defense mechanism to channel his negative feelings and anxiety. Thus, this study concluded that music can be used as a medium to channel negative feelings and anxiety experienced by songwriters as their defense mechanism. Additionally, this study showed that Twenty One Pilots songs often deal with issues related to mental health, personal development, self-doubt, and discovering purpose in life.

The researcher realizes that there are still weaknesses in this study. This study only analyzes five songs in the album *Vessel* (2013) by Twenty One Pilots: "Ode To Sleep", "Migraine", "Car Radio", "Guns for Hands", and "Holding On To You", whereas there are 12 songs in this album. Based on this weakness, this study offers a recommendation for future researchers. Future research can analyze the defense mechanisms contained in the lyrics of the seven songs that this study has not discovered: "House of Gold", "Semi-Automatic", "Screen", "The Run and Go", "Fake You Out", "Trees", and "Truce". With all humility, the researcher hopes that this research can be useful and informative for literary researchers, especially researchers who are interested in analyzing song lyrics. Future researchers who want to extend and complement their research may use the data in this study.

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APPENDIXES

Appendix A

Ode To Sleep

[Verse 1]

I wake up fine and dandy, but then by the  
time I find it handy  
To rip my heart apart and start planning my  
crash landing  
I go up, up, up, up, up to the ceiling  
Then I feel my soul start leaving like an old  
man's hair receding  
I'm pleading, "Please, oh please!" on my  
knees repeatedly asking  
Why it's got to be like this, is this living  
free?  
I don't wanna be the one, be the one who  
has the  
Sun's blood on my hands, I'll tell the moon  
Take this weapon forged in darkness  
Some see a pen, I see a harpoon

[Pre-Chorus]

I'll stay awake 'cause the dark's not taking  
prisoners tonight  
Why am I not scared in the morning?  
I don't hear those voices calling  
I must have kicked them out, I must have  
kicked them out  
I swear I heard demons yelling  
Those crazy words they were spelling  
They told me I was gone, they told me I was  
gone

[Chorus]

But I'll tell 'em, "Why won't you let me go?  
Do I threaten all your plans? I'm  
insignificant"  
Please tell 'em, you have no plans for me  
I will set my soul on fire, what have I  
become?  
I'll tell 'em

[Verse 2]

On the eve of a day that's forgotten and fake  
As the trees, they await, and clouds  
anticipate  
The start of a day when we put on our face  
A mask that portrays that we don't need  
grace  
On the eve of a day that is bigger than us  
But we open our eyes 'cause we're told that  
we must

And the trees wave their arms and the  
clouds try to plead  
Desperately yelling, "There's something we  
need!"  
I'm not free, I asked forgiveness three times  
Same amount that I denied, I three-time  
MVP'd this crime  
I'm afraid to tell you who I adore, won't tell  
you who I'm singing towards  
Metaphorically, I'm a whore, and that's denial  
number four

[Pre-Chorus]

I'll stay awake 'cause the dark's not taking  
prisoners tonight  
Why am I not scared in the morning?  
I don't hear those voices calling  
I must have kicked them out, I must have  
kicked them out  
I swear I heard demons yelling  
Those crazy words they were spelling  
They told me I was gone, they told me I was  
gone

[Chorus]

But I'll tell 'em, "Why won't you let me go?  
Do I threaten all your plans? I'm  
insignificant"  
Please tell 'em, you have no plans for me  
I will set my soul on fire, what have I  
become?

[Outro]

I'll tell 'em, you have no plans for me, I will  
set my soul on fire  
What have I become? I'll tell 'em, I'll tell 'em,  
I'll tell 'em  
I'll tell 'em, please tell 'em, you have no  
plans for me  
I will set my soul on fire, what have I  
become? I'm sorry

**Appendix B**

**Migraine**

[Intro]

Am I the only one I know  
Waging my wars behind my face and above  
my throat?  
Shadows will scream that I'm alone-lone-lone

[Verse 1]

I-I-I-I've got a migraine  
And my pain will range from up, down, and  
sideways  
Thank God it's Friday 'cause Fridays will  
always be better than Sundays  
'Cause Sundays are my suicide days  
I don't know why they always seem so  
dismal  
Thunderstorms, clouds, snow, and a slight  
drizzle  
Whether it's the weather or the letters by my  
bed  
Sometimes death seems better than the  
migraine in my head  
Let it be said what the headache represents  
It's me defending in suspense, it's me  
suspended in a defenseless test  
Being tested by a ruthless examiner  
That's represented best by my depressing  
thoughts  
I do not have writer's block, my writer just  
hates the clock  
It will not let me sleep, I guess I'll sleep  
when I'm dead  
And sometimes death seems better than the  
migraine in my head

[Chorus]

Am I the only one I know  
Waging my wars behind my face and above  
my throat?  
Shadows will scream that I'm alone  
But I know, we've made it this far, kid

[Post-Chorus]

Yeah, yeah, yeah

[Verse 2]

I am not as fine as I seem, pardon  
Me for yelling, I'm telling you green gardens  
Are not what's growing in my psyche, it's a  
different me  
A difficult beast feasting on burnt down  
trees

Freeze frame, please let me paint a mental  
picture portrait  
Something you won't forget, it's all about my  
forehead

And how it is a door that holds back  
contents  
That makes Pandora's box contents look  
non-violent  
Behind my eyelids are islands of violence  
My mind ship-wrecked, this is the only land  
my mind could find  
I did not know it was such a violent island  
Bullet tidal waves, suicidal crazed lions  
They're trying to eat me, blood running  
down their chin  
And I know that I can fight, or I can let the  
lion win  
I begin to assemble what weapons I can find  
'Cause sometimes to stay alive, you gotta kill  
your mind

[Chorus]

Am I the only one I know  
Waging my wars behind my face and above  
my throat?  
Shadows will scream that I'm alone  
But I know, we've made it this far, kid

[Post-Chorus]

(Ah, yeah) Yeah, yeah, yeah  
(Oh, oh) Yeah, yeah, yeah

[Bridge]

And I will say that we should take a day to  
break away  
From all the pain our brain has made, the  
game is not played alone  
And I will say that we should take a moment  
and hold it  
And keep it frozen and know that life has a  
hopeful undertone  
And I will say that we should take a day to  
break away  
From all the pain our brain has made, the  
game is not played alone  
And I will say that we should take a moment  
and hold it  
And keep it frozen and know that life has a  
hopeful undertone

[Chorus]

Am I the only one I know, oh  
Waging my wars behind my face and above  
my throat?  
Shadows will scream that I'm alone

But I know, we've made it this far, kid

[Outro]

I've made it this far

I've made it this f-

**Appendix C**

Car Radio

[Refrain]

I ponder of something great  
My lungs will fill and then deflate  
They fill with fire, exhale desire  
I know it's dire, my time today  
I have these thoughts so often, I ought  
To replace that slot with what I once bought  
'Cause somebody stole my car radio  
And now I just sit in silence

[Verse 1]

Sometimes quiet is violent  
I find it hard to hide it, my pride is no longer  
inside  
It's on my sleeve, my skin will scream  
Reminding me of who I killed inside my  
dream  
I hate this car that I'm driving, there's no  
hiding for me  
I'm forced to deal with what I feel  
There is no distraction to mask what is real  
I could pull the steering wheel

[Refrain]

I have these thoughts so often, I ought  
To replace that slot with what I once bought  
'Cause somebody stole my car radio  
And now I just sit in silence

[Verse 2]

I ponder of something terrifying  
'Cause this time there's no sound to hide  
behind  
I find over the course of our human  
existence  
One thing consists of consistence  
And it's that we're all battling fear  
Oh dear, I don't know if we know why we're  
here  
Oh my, too deep, please stop thinking  
I liked it better when my car had sound  
There are things we can do  
But from the things that work there are only  
two  
And-a from the two that we choose to do  
Peace will win and fear will lose  
And there's faith and there's sleep  
We need to pick one, please, because  
Faith is to be awake and to be awake is for  
us to think  
And for us to think is to be alive  
And I will try with every rhyme

To come across like I am dying  
To let you know you need to try to think

[Refrain]

I have these thoughts so often, I ought  
To replace that slot with what I once bought  
'Cause somebody stole my car radio  
And now I just sit in silence

[Bridge]

(Woah, oh-woah-oh)  
(Woah, oh-woah-oh)  
(Woah, oh-woah-oh)  
(Woah, oh-woah-oh)  
And now I just sit in silence  
And now I just sit in silence  
And now I just sit  
And now I just sit in silence  
And now I just sit in silence  
And now I just sit in silence  
And now I just sit in silence  
And now I just sit

[Refrain]

I ponder of something great  
My lungs will fill and then deflate  
They fill with fire, exhale desire  
I know it's dire, my time today  
I have these thoughts so often, I ought  
To replace that slot with what I once bought  
'Cause somebody stole my car radio  
And now I just sit in silence

**Appendix D**

Guns for Hands

[Verse 1]

I know what you think in the morning  
When the sun shines on the ground  
And shows what you have done  
It shows where your mind has gone  
And you swear to your parents  
That it will never happen again  
I know, I know-ow-ow  
What that means, I know-ow-ow-ow-ow

[Chorus]

That you all have guns  
And you never put the safety on  
And you all have plans  
To take it, to take it, don't take it, take it,  
take it  
I'm trying, I'm trying to sleep  
I'm trying, I'm trying to sleep  
But I can't, but I can't when you all have  
Guns for hands, yeah  
I'm trying, I'm trying to sleep

I'm trying, I'm trying to sleep  
But I can't, but I can't when you all have  
Guns for hands, yeah

[Verse 2]  
Let's take this a second at a time  
Let's take this one song, this one rhyme  
Together, let's breathe  
Together, to the beat  
But there's hope out the window  
So that's where we'll go  
Let's go outside and all join hands  
But until then you'll never understand

[Chorus]  
That you all have guns  
And you never put the safety on  
And you all have plans  
To take it, to take it, don't take it, take it,  
take it (Don't take it)  
I'm trying, I'm trying to sleep  
I'm trying, I'm trying to sleep  
But I can't, but I can't when you all have  
Guns for hands, yeah

[Interlude]  
Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah  
Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah  
Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah  
Yeah, yeah  
Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah  
Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah  
Whoo!  
(Da-da da-da-da)  
(Da-da da-da-da)  
(Da-da da-da-da, ah uh)  
(Da-da da-da-da)

[Bridge]  
We've turned our hands to guns  
Traded our thumbs for ammunition  
I must forewarn you of my disorder, or my  
condition  
'Cause when the sun sets  
It upsets what's left of my invested interest  
Interested in putting my fingers to my head  
The solution is, I see a whole room of these  
mutant kids  
Fused at the wrist, I simply tell them they  
should shoot at this  
Simply suggest my chest and this confused  
music  
It's obviously best for them to turn their  
guns to a fist

[Chorus]  
I'm trying, I'm trying to sleep  
I'm trying, I'm trying to sleep  
But I can't, but I can't when you all have  
Guns for hands, yeah  
I'm trying, I'm trying to sleep (I'm trying to  
sleep)  
I'm trying, I'm trying to sleep (I'm trying to  
sleep)  
But I can't, but I can't when you all have  
Guns for hands, yeah

## Appendix E Holding On To You

[Verse 1]  
I'm taking over my body, back in control, no  
more shotty  
I bet a lot of me was lost, "T"'s uncrossed  
and "I"'s undotted  
I fought it a lot and it seems a lot like flesh  
is all I got  
Not anymore, flesh out the door, swat  
I must've forgot, you can't trust me  
I'm open a moment and close when you  
show it  
Before you know it, I'm lost at sea  
And now that I write and think about it and  
the story unfolds  
You should take my life, you should take my  
soul

[Break]  
Ah-ah-ah-ah-ah-ah, ah-ah-ah-ah-ah-ah  
Ah-ah-ah-ah-ah-ah, ah-ah-ah-ah-ah-ah

[Chorus]  
You are surrounding, all my surroundings  
Sounding down the mountain range of my  
left-side brain  
You are surrounding, all my surroundings  
Twisting the kaleidoscope behind both of  
my eyes

[Post-Chorus]  
(Ah-ah-ah-ah-ah-ah, ah-ah-ah-ah-ah-ah)  
And I'll be holding on to you  
(Ah-ah-ah-ah-ah-ah, ah-ah-ah-ah-ah-ah)  
And I'll be holding on to you

[Verse 2]  
Remember the moment you know exactly  
where you're goin'  
'Cause the next moment before you know it  
Time is slowin' and it's frozen still

And the windowsill looks really nice, right?  
You think twice about your life, it probably  
happens at night, right?  
Fight it, take the pain, ignite it  
Tie a noose around your mind, loose enough  
to breathe fine  
And tie it to a tree, tell it, "You belong to me  
This ain't a noose, this is a leash  
And I have news for you, you must obey me"

[Chorus]

You are surrounding, all my surroundings  
Sounding down the mountain range of my  
left-side brain  
You are surrounding, all my surroundings  
Twisting the kaleidoscope behind both of  
my eyes

[Bridge]

Entertain my faith, entertain my faith  
Entertain my faith, entertain my faith  
Entertain my faith, entertain my faith  
Entertain my faith, entertain my faith  
Entertain my faith, entertain my faith

[Breakdown]

Lean with it, rock with it, when we gonna  
stop with it?  
Lyrics that mean nothin', we were gifted with  
thought  
Is it time to move our feet, to an  
introspective beat?  
It ain't the speakers that bump hearts, it's  
our hearts that make the beat  
Lean with it, rock with it, when we gonna  
stop with it?

Lyrics that mean nothin', we were gifted with  
thought

Is it time to move our feet, to an  
introspective beat?

It ain't the speakers that bump hearts, it's  
our hearts that make the beat

Lean with it, rock with it, when we gonna  
stop with it?

Lyrics that mean nothin', we were gifted with  
thought

Is it time to move our feet, to an  
introspective beat?

It ain't the speakers that bump hearts, it's  
our hearts that make the beat

Lean with it, rock with it, when we gonna  
stop with it?

Lyrics that mean nothin', we were gifted with  
thought

Is it time to move our feet, to an  
introspective beat?

It ain't the speakers that bump hearts and  
it's our hearts that make the beat

[Outro]

(Ah-ah-ah-ah-ah-ah, ah-ah-ah-ah-ah-ah)

And I'll be holding on to you, and I'll be  
holding on to you

(Ah-ah-ah-ah-ah-ah, ah-ah-ah-ah-ah-ah)

And I'll be holding on to you, and I'll be  
holding on to you

(Ah-ah-ah-ah-ah-ah, ah-ah-ah-ah-ah-ah)

And I'll be holding on to you, and I'll be  
holding on to you

(Ah-ah-ah-ah-ah-ah, ah-ah-ah-ah-ah-ah)

And I'll be holding on to you, and I'll be  
holding on to you