



**THE IMPACT OF CHILDHOOD PSYCHOLOGICAL TRAUMA ON
MAIN CHARACTER'S ATTITUDE DEVELOPMENT IN JOHN
BOYNE'S *FIRE*: THEORY OF EGO DEFENSE
MECHANISMS**

THESIS

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to:

1. My dearest mother, Khotimah, and my dearest father, Sigit Sari Asmoro, whose unwavering love, endless support, and heartfelt prayers have been my greatest source of strength.
2. My brother, Chandra Dwi Kartika Mahaputra S. A., thank you for always believing in me until I was able to complete this thesis.
3. My beloved family members, Selvi Aprilianty, Mama Uzi, Erni Yulianti, Yudi, Moch. Yahya for all the support, assistance, and never-ending prayers.

MOTTO

“Always believe in yourself. Do this and no matter where you are, you will have
nothing to fear”

-Hayao Miyazaki-

“I am seeking, I am striving, I am in it with all my heart”

-Vincent van Gogh-

DECLARATION

I sincerely declare that this thesis, entitled *The Impact of Childhood Psychological Trauma on the Main Character's Attitude Development in John Boyne's Fire: Theory of Ego Defense Mechanisms*, is an original piece of academic writing. I certify that the analysis and research presented in this thesis have not been submitted previously for any academic degree or publication. I also confirm that all sources used and any support received during the writing of this thesis have been properly acknowledged.

Jember, 25 May 2025

The Writer

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APPROVAL SHEET

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SUMMARY

The Impact of Childhood Psychological Trauma on Main Character's Attitude Development in John Boyne's *Fire*: Theory of Ego Defense Mechanisms, Millennia Cipta Flowerenzia Sari Asmoro, 1801101010063; 2025; 72 pages; English Department, Faculty of Humanities, University of Jember.

This thesis explores the attitude development of Freya Petrus, the main character in John Boyne's novel *Fire*, through the lens of Freud's theory of ego defense mechanisms. The study focuses on how childhood psychological trauma, particularly sexual abuse, being buried alive, and neglect, as well as rejection, shapes Freya's attitudes and behaviors across different stages of her life.

Using a qualitative research method, the thesis draws from primary data primary data and secondary data. The primary data are in the form of narrations, dialogues, and statements in the novel by John Boyne entitled *Fire* as the main focus in this research. The secondary data are taken from several books, journal articles and sites available on the internet that are still related to the topic to be analyzed.

The thesis reveals that childhood trauma profoundly affects Freya's psychological structure, making her id-dominated, while her ego serves primarily as a mask to fit societal expectations. Her superego, shaped by inadequate moral guidance, remains underdeveloped, allowing destructive impulses to manifest in concealed ways. Freya's traumatic experiences also lead to the employment of Freudian ego defense mechanisms such as repression, rationalization, sublimation, denial, reaction formation, displacement, projection, and identification. In the early phase, Freya uses repression and rationalization, shaping a reserved attitude and leading her to normalize abuse. In her teenage phase, she employs sublimation, redirecting her emotional trauma into constructive activities, such as pursuing a career in medicine focused on burn victims which helps to develop a sense of professionalism. In adulthood, she uses more complex defense mechanisms as she struggles with enclosed spaces, distrust of men, and a hidden urge for control and revenge. These mechanisms contribute to the development of a reserved attitude, hatred toward men, and a defensive attitude.

In conclusion, this study confirms that Freud's psychoanalytic theory reveals how a character could possibly overcome the dark past by negotiating between the individual and the social, thereby justifying her actions. The novel unearths the dilemma between being and being-for-others, and also exposes the darker side of sublimation—a tragedy hidden behind skill, masked by professionalism, and driven by unresolved trauma rooted in the past.

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CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the background of the study as overview of the thesis. It presents the description about the topic that will be discussed. There will be detail explanation in subchapter; those are the background of the study, research question and the goal of the study.

1.1 Background of the Study

According to American Psychological Association (2022), trauma is defined as an emotional response to horrible events, including natural disasters, accidents, neglect, war, witnessing violence and death of loved ones, and physical or emotional abuse. Short-term emotional responses may include shock and denial, while long-term responses may manifest as unstable emotions, relationship strain, flashbacks, and even physical symptoms such as nausea and headaches. Trauma is also defined as psychological phenomenon that can lead to disorders of stress, depression, anxiety, disruptive behavior, and substance abuse (Alisic et al., 2014).

Psychological phenomena experienced by people in real life are of interest to many people, including writers. Generally, such psychological issues become a topic that can be incorporated into literary works. According to Sumardjo & Saini (1994), literature serves as a medium for the expression of the human experience, encompassing a wide range of personal and collective thoughts, ideas, beliefs, feelings, and passions through the creative use of language. Literature, in its various forms, whether oral (such as folklore and oral traditions) or written (including short stories, novels, and the other texts), has the remarkable ability to evoke a sense of enchantment through its use of language (pp. 3-4). In literature, characters are the key to the fact that literature is a depiction of real life. The characters are imitations of real people living in society, possessing the same psychological aspects in fictional form (Wellek & Warren, 2019). The psychology of characters appears more obvious in literary works that explore psychological issues, one of which is trauma.

A significant example of psychological trauma in literary work is shown in the novel *Fire* (Boyne, 2024). This novel is the third book in John Boyne's Element Series, also known as the Element Quartet. The Element series comprises four novels: *Water* (2023), *Earth* (2024), *Fire* (2024), and *Air* (2025), which are published sequentially. The four novels in this series, authored by John Boyne, are interconnected by a common theme, that is the cycle of abuse and complicity, with each novel offering a story about different protagonist and distinct perspective of sexual abuse from the perspectives of the enabler, the complicit bystander, the perpetrator and the victim.

Fire tells the life of Freya Petrus, a surgeon specializing in skin grafts and burns who exhibits deep-seated fear of enclosed spaces, paranoia towards men, and psychopathic tendencies due to childhood trauma. During her childhood, her relationship with her mother is not very good. She lives apart from her mother, Beth, and nurtured by her grandmother, Hannah, in Norfolk, England. Her grandmother is very strict to her. She is not permitted to engage in social activities, such as playing with his friends, which has led to feelings of loneliness. Freya could only visit and spend time with her mother for two months every summer. At the age of twelve, in the summertime, Freya meet some people who influence and change the course of her life. She is sexually abused and buried alive by Arthur and Pascoe, two fourteen-years-old boys who are the sons of her mother's neighbor. She experiences childhood events that traumatize her, affecting her psychology as well as her actions in responding to a problem she faces, including her attitude development.

Throughout the novel, Freya exhibits various defense mechanisms due to her childhood psychological trauma, which Freud theorized as essential ego strategies to cope with traumatic memories. By applying Freud's theoretical framework, this study will focus to explore the impact of childhood psychological trauma on attitude development by examining the protagonist's defense mechanisms in *Fire*. I will explore the cause of the trauma and how the character's internal conflicts, as mediated by the ego's defensive strategies, shape her interactions with the world around her. I am interested to analysing this topic

because there has been no previous study on this topic in this novel yet and I would like to show the reader that childhood traumatic experienced may influence attitude development and result in something fatal, both for the individual itself as well as the surrounding environment.

1.2 Research Questions

Based on the background of the study above, there are some questions that are formulated to find the answer to the problem.

1. What is the traumatic childhood experience of the main character in John Boyne's *Fire*?
2. What impact is seen on the main character's attitude development in John Boyne's *Fire*?

1.3 The Goal of the Study

There are several goals of the research. The goals of this research are as follows.

1. To describe the childhood trauma experienced by the main character in John Boyne's novel *Fire*.
2. To discover and explore what impact is seen on the attitude development of the main character in John Boyne's *Fire*.

CHAPTER II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review is utilized in order to support the analysis of this research. This chapter is composed of two subchapters. The initial subchapter explains the previous research that is pertinent to the research topic, while the subsequent subchapter offers an explanation of the approaches and the theories that is employed in order to analyze John Boyne's *Fire* novel. The analysis of this study will utilize Freud's ego defense mechanisms theory.

2.1 Previous Research

This subchapter draws the findings of previous researches, which provides relevant insights related to the topic and explain the gaps in the research. There are some previous researches in this subchapter.

The first previous research from Novaditya (2016), which analyze the characteristics and types of psychopaths and to find the causes of the characters becoming psychopaths in the novel by Gillian Flynn entitled *Gone Girl*. In his analysis, he examines Verstappen's characteristics of psychopaths and uses Sigmund Freud's tripartite psychological perspective (id, ego, and superego) as his approach. Rosin found that Amy, as the main character, has psychopathic traits such as compulsive lying, manipulation, lack of remorse, grandiosity, and antisocial behavior. From a psychoanalytic perspective, the author found that the id of Amy is more dominant than the ego and the superego. Therefore, it can be said that Amy is a psychopath. This research provides the gap in information about psychoanalysis theory and tripartite model (id, ego and superego) by Sigmund Freud.

The second was Kustiyah et al. (2012) which conducted a study of ego defense mechanisms of Mr. Borkman as the protagonist in the plays by Henrik Ibsen entitled *John Gabriel Borkman*. It presents the condition in the nineteenth century in which the main character has to face the worst conclusion, that is death, when he wants to rebuild his life. It also discusses the economic situation, love, and family. Kustiyah et al. applied the theory of ego defense mechanisms to analyze Mr. Borkman's actions in repressing feelings of guilt, anger, fear of punishment, and

other emotions that protect him from painful experiences. As a result, the researchers identified six defense mechanisms used by Mr. Borkman: denial, isolation, projection, displacement, rationalization, and reaction formation. This research provides the gap in information how to apply the theory of ego defense mechanisms in this thesis.

The third previous research was Wibisono & Pandin (2024) also conducted a psychoanalysis study for the novel entitled *The Perfect Child* which was written by Lucinda Berry. This novel tells a story about Jenie who was traumatized by being abused and abandoned by Becky or her biological mother during her childhood. The trauma triggers changes in her psychological behavior that tends to refer to psychopaths such as being aggressive to animals, unable to distinguish friends or enemies and bullying other children. To gain a deeper understanding, Wibisono & Pandin used qualitative methods and Sigmund Freud's theory of psychoanalysis, particularly defense mechanisms and the tripartite model of id, ego and superego. In their results, they revealed that Jenie developed defense mechanisms such as regression, acting out, projection and displacement to protect herself. These refer to the traits of a psychopath. This research provides the gap in information about the childhood trauma. The contribution of this research is that, it gives the depth understanding for me to apply the theory of ego defense mechanisms and tripartite model (id, ego, and superego) in this thesis.

Several studies have shown that psychological trauma can trigger changes in individual attitudes as a form of self-protective response through ego defense mechanisms (Cramer & Porcerelli, 2016; Finzi et al., 2003; Tallandini & Caudek, 2010; Ward, 1988). Ward (1988) indicated that trauma victims, particularly those who have experienced sexual abuse, tend to employ defense mechanisms such as repression and rationalization. Similarly, Finzi et al. (2003) found notable differences in the use of defense mechanisms between traumatized and non-traumatized children (those exposed to abuse and neglect), with the exception of displacement, which appeared to be unaffected. The development and use of defense mechanisms are also observed to vary across three developmental stages: childhood, teenage, and adulthood (Cramer, 1987; Cramer & Porcerelli, 2016).

The research was done by Palupy (2016). She analyzed *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* by John Boyne to uncover how the dark themes reflect the main character's sense of pleasure using children's literature theory. As a result, She identifies five key themes: anger, sadness, insecurity, oppression, and a dark environment in children's lives. Similarity, Made et al. (2022) examines the novel's portrayal of Holocaust experiences and, through a qualitative method, identifies five social issues: child labor, class diversity, slavery, ethnocentrism, and the marginalization of women. These researches highlight John Boyne's versatility as a writer and the depth of his engagement with complex social, historical, and ethical issues, and also give the depth understanding about children issues.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

2.2.1 Psychoanalysis

Sigmund Freud first proposed the ideas and thoughts of psychoanalysis in 1893. This psychoanalytic theory is considered the most comprehensive of all personality theories, but it has received both positive reactions and criticism from society. The notion of the crucial role of consciousness and unconsciousness along with the powerful and irrational instincts of sex and aggression that control human behavior became Freud's monumental findings (Johnson, 2018, p. 6).

According to Freud's psychoanalytic theory, the human personality is composed of three distinct structures: the id, the ego, and the superego. It is described as follows.

a. The Meaning of Id

The id is a part of the human personality that exists from birth. The forms of the id include motivations, needs, and expectations that arise spontaneously. The id can be said to be the source of human psychic energy and the reservoir of pulses located in the unconscious. The id is the controller of human instincts to fulfill every basic human need such as sleep, as well as sexual needs. In Minderop, p. (2016, p. 21), Freud argues that the id works in the unconscious and has no contact with

reality at all. The id works on the basis of the pleasure principle that always seeks satisfaction and rejects pain.

b. The Meaning of Ego

Ego is the second part of the personality structure of Freud's theory that can operate at the intersection of the conscious, preconscious, and unconscious. According to Freud in (Feist et al., 2018, ch. 2 p. 29), the ego is defined as the part of the mind that only deals with reality. The ego works on the basis of the reality principle that seeks to satisfy the desires of the id.

The ego is incapable of functioning independently of the id. It develops from the id and ensures that the id can be expressed in the real world. Ego serves as a mediator and filter between the demands of the id and the prohibitions of the superego (Freud, 2019). The ego resides between these two boundaries, fulfilling individual needs without crossing the boundaries of reality in the present life. The ego is responsible for establishing the framework for fundamental cognitive processes, including rational thought and decision-making (Feist et al., 2018).

c. The Meaning of Superego

Lastly, the superego, a component of Freud's personality structure, constitutes the moral aspect of personality. It is guided by idealistic and moralistic principles, encompassing values and norms (Hall, 2019, p. 35). A notable distinction between the superego and the ego is its lack of external contact, stemming from its unrealistic expectations of perfection (Feist et al., 2018, p. 36).

According to Boeree (2021), the superego is comprised of two aspects. The first aspect is conscience, which is defined as the warning and internalization of punishment. It arises from experiences with punishment and provides a warning against behaviors that violate values and norms. The second aspect is ego-ideal, which is derived from the experience of rewards for appropriate behavior and positive models provided to the child. Freud (2019) defines superego as the holder of morality in human personality or can be called conscience that has insight into

good and bad things. The superego acts as a barrier to the perfect gratification obtained from teaching and knowledge gained by humans.

2.2.2 Freudian Ego Defense Mechanisms

Defense mechanisms are a concept in psychoanalysis developed by Sigmund Freud and later expanded by his daughter, Anna Freud. These mechanisms are unconscious psychological strategies used by individuals to protect themselves from anxiety, inner conflict, or unacceptable feelings (Freud, 2019). According to Freud, the human mind consists of the id, ego, and superego, where the ego is responsible for balancing the primitive urges of the id with the moral demands of the superego. When conflicts arise among these components, the ego employs defense mechanisms to reduce psychological pressure (A. Freud, 2018). In the book *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defence* (2018), Freud mentions that there are ten defense mechanisms. Those are described as follows.

a. Repression

Repression is the process of pushing unpleasant memories or urges into the subconscious, making the individual unaware of their existence. Repression as an attempt to avoid feelings of anxiety, resulting in the individual being unaware of the impulses that cause anxiety. Individuals also do not remember past emotional and traumatic experiences. For example, someone who was abused as a child may not remember it, but the trauma still affects their life through nightmares, flashbacks, or unexplained fears.

b. Projection

Projection occurs when a person attributes their own negative feelings, desires, or traits to others, allowing them to avoid acknowledging their own weaknesses. It usually occurs due to encountering undesirable situations or things and the individual cannot accept it, then delegates it to other reasons. For example, Mr. Borkman blames his wife for his corruption to protect him from the anxiety of punishment from the judge (Kustiyah et al., 2012).

c. Denial

Denial occurs when a person refuses to accept reality because it is too painful or threatens their emotional stability. This mechanism is employed to mitigate feelings of guilt and preserve self-esteem. Someone who has just lost a loved one might say, “No, this can't be happening.” A person who is addicted to alcohol but says, “I have no problem with drinking alcohol.”

d. Displacement

Displacement occurs when a person redirects their emotions from the actual target to another person or object that is perceived as safer. This mechanism is often used to reduce anxiety and manage anger. An example is when Mr. Borkman was considered a criminal, he could not let out his anger in his office, so he transferred the anger to others around him including his wife and Ella (Kustiyah et al., 2012).

e. Sublimation

Sublimation is a healthy defense mechanism in which a person redirects emotional energy or unacceptable impulses into more productive activities. Socially beneficial actions replace uncomfortable feelings. For example, a person with aggressive urges redirects those urges to more socially acceptable actions by becoming a martial artist or soldier.

f. Rationalization

Rationalization occurs when a person seeks logical reasons or justifications to cover up failure, mistakes, or behavior that actually stems from emotional impulses. This occurs when the real motive for one's behavior is not acceptable to the ego. Someone who fails an exam says, “I didn't want to go to that university, so it doesn't matter.”

g. Regression

Regression occurs when a person experiences stress or emotional pressure and reverts to more childlike behaviors as a form of self-protection. It is done in

order to feel safe and get the attention of others. For example, in *The Perfect Child*, even though Janie has been trained to pee in the bathroom, she still pees on things to attract the attention of her mother, Hannah (Wibisono & Pandin, 2024).

h. Reaction Formation

Reaction formation occurs when a person acts in a way that is opposite to their true feelings or impulses because they perceive their original urges as socially unacceptable. Simply put, this formation reaction is the opposite of what is felt. For example, someone who actually feels very angry with someone, but is actually very friendly and loving towards that person.

i. Undoing

Undoing occurs when a person takes an action to cancel out or make amends for their guilt over a previous behavior. The mechanism aims to neutralize distress caused by internal thoughts or actions. For example, someone who cheated on their spouse might buy their partner an expensive gift to make amends.

j. Identification

Identification occurs when a person mimics and adopts traits, behaviors, or values from others. This is done with the aim of reducing anxiety and building self-confidence. For example, a teenage girl begins to dress, speak and act like her mother because she sees her mother as a graceful and respected figure.

CHAPTER III. METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, the author mentions some points to explain the research methodology. Those are type of research, data collection, and then data processing and analysis.

3.1 Research Methodology

3.1.1 Type of Research

The research is using qualitative data, which focuses on collecting non-numeric data and analyzing information. It will focus on exploring, in as much detail as possible example which are seem as being interesting and relate to topic that chosen by the writer.

3.1.2 Data Collection

In this research, the author utilizes two kinds of data: primary data and secondary data. Primary data refers to the source of data, which is derived from the novel John Boyne's *Fire*. The source of data is the main material taken from the written storyline, which comprises a sequence of words or sentences. It includes some narrations, statements and words refer to the particular topic in the story John Boyne's *Fire*. While secondary data will be taken from several books, journal articles and sites available on the internet that are still related to the topic to be analyzed.

3.1.3 Data Processing and Analysis

In the process of analyzing data, the writer employs the following steps: first, the writer will conduct a close reading of John Boyne's *Fire* novel. This is done to gather some information and understanding of the issues related to the background of this study, such as the traumatic childhood experience of main character and the impacts on main character's attitude resulting from having childhood psychological trauma. Secondly, the author will read and understand the

scope of the theory used. Thirdly, the writer will taking notes of the information and the key points based on the problem of the study. Fourthly, the author will select, organize and classify several parts of the novel that are considered important in accordance with the criteria for the problem of the study. Fifthly, the writer will explain the traumatic childhood experience of the main character and analyze the tripartite model (id, ego, superego) based on the past and the present result. And then, the writer will analyze the issues based on second research questions using Freudian ego defense mechanisms (repression, projection, denial, displacement, sublimation, rationalization, reaction formation, identification) in main character's early phase, teenage and adulthood. Finally, the writer will draw conclusions from the research.

CHAPTER IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This chapter provides a discussion John Boyne's novel *Fire*. The discussion focuses on the main character named Freya Petrus who experiences childhood psychological trauma which affects her attitude development. The analysis employs the theoretical framework of Freud's ego defense mechanisms to explore Freya Petrus's attitude development in the novel *Fire*.

4.1 Freya Petrus's Traumatic Childhood Experience

In John Boyne's *Fire*, the character Freya Petrus undergoes a series of traumatic childhood experiences that significantly influence her development of attitudes. These experiences encompass sexual abuse, being buried alive, and neglect, as well as rejection. This subchapter explains about the analysis of the childhood experiences in order to provide a comprehensive understanding of the impact on Freya's attitude development.

Freya experiences sexual abuse at the age of twelve during a summer visit to her mother Beth's residence. The incident takes place in a cave near the house, where she is entrapped and molested by two fourteen-year-old brothers, Arthur and Pascoe who are neighbors of her mother and individuals whom Freya perceives as friends.

Datum 1

He reached out and took my hand, pressing it to the crotch of his shorts, and when I didn't immediately remove it, he smiled and glanced towards his brother, who was watching us intently. From what little I understood, I thought it was supposed to be enjoyable for both people, but it wasn't enjoyable for me. I felt like a piece of meat, lying on the ground, while Arthur did what he wanted to it. He didn't even look me in the eye. When he was finished, however, which was only two or three minutes later, Pascoe started to unbuckle the belt on his shorts, and this time I did say no.

'No!' insisted Arthur. 'He's my brother. If I get to do it, then he does too.'

I glanced behind me. There were several tunnels leading from where we were and I wasn't sure which one would take me back to the beach and which would lead me further into an inescapable labyrinth.

‘I’m going home,’ I said, turning away, but Pascoe ran ahead, cutting me off.

‘It’s my turn!’ he shouted. ‘You said we could both do it!’

‘I didn’t!’ I cried, because I’d said no such thing. ‘I can’t, anyway. It hurt.’ (Boyne, 2024, p. 55)

In datum 1, Freya experiences sexual abuse in a situation where she has no control or power over her own body. It is shown by the following sentence “I felt like a piece of meat, lying on the ground, while Arthur did what he wanted to it.” It describes the feeling of objectification where her body is not her own, but merely an object of gratification for someone else, specifically Arthur. The sentence demonstrates Freya’s experience of dehumanization, that is, not treated as an equal human being. She perceives herself as a piece of meat floating on the ground. As indicated in datum 1, Freya also exhibits a state of confusion and a loss of understanding regarding issues of sexuality. It is shown in the sentence “From what little I understood, I thought it was supposed to be enjoyable for both people, but it wasn’t enjoyable for me.” This sentence reflects Freya’s internal conflict and confusion as a victim of sexual abuse, Freya is a twelve-year-old young girl who does not yet have a complete understanding of sexuality. Freya experiences a state of confusion and distress, where her understanding of sexuality as something that should be enjoyable for both parties contradicts the reality at hand. She feels sick, forced, and has no chance to say no. She realizes that the experience deviates from what should happen in a healthy intimate interaction. When Freya tries to resist, the resistance is broken by Arthur’s cruel logic ‘He’s my brother. If I get to do it, then he does too’ (Boyne, 2024, p. 55). It shows how Freya is not a victim of one individual, but a victim of a coercive and oppressive relationship system. If Freya can do that with Arthur, then Freya should also do that with her brother Pascoe. It shows the exploitation, social pressure, and how sexual violence can involve power dynamics and coercion that Freya experiences. Freya makes several refusals by saying ‘I didn’t’ I cried, which shows increasing fear. Freya cries and tries to run away from Arthur and Pascoe because she does not want it to happen. Freya’s experience of trauma is deepened because the act is performed without empathy, eye contact, and without the genuine consent of Freya, who is still trying to

understand the true meaning of sexual intercourse. This experience makes Freya developing self-defense mechanisms such as repression, projection, denial, displacement, rationalization, reaction formation, and identification.

The sexual intercourse between Freya and the two brothers continues every day until the following month. Although she does not find it enjoyable, Freya allows them to engage in sexual intercourse with her body because she is fear of being abandoned and experiencing the loneliness like she used to. Before the end of the vacation, Freya feels fed up and does not want to do it anymore. She tells and threatens Arthur and Pascoe that she will tell someone if they make Freya have sexual intercourse again. Freya's statement makes Arthur and Pascoe unhappy. This situation results in her having a second traumatic experience for her, as she was buried alive.

Datum 2

‘Happy?’ I asked, but instead of answering, they pulled the lid of the box over, shutting it tight. Immediately, everything went black. Shocked, I didn’t even have the strength of mind to push it back up, and a hammering began from outside. To my horror, I realized that they were nailing it closed. After a moment, I found my voice and started banging at the makeshift ceiling, calling their names, begging to be set free.

I screamed and continued to push at the roof as more soil landed and, even though I knew the chest was already at the base of the pit, I imagined the scene from outside, the entire quarry being filled with soil and me disappearing for ever beneath it. I banged and banged, growing more terrified than I had ever been in my life before. This was it, I told myself. This was how I was going to die.

Buried alive. (Boyne, 2024, p. 58)

In datum 2, it describes a traumatic event experienced by the character Freya, in which she is buried alive by Arthur and Pascoe. The incident occurs at night in a construction waste pit located in Arthur and Pascoe's house, which is under construction at the time. Initially, Arthur and Pascoe approach Freya with an apology for their previous actions, inviting her to participate in what they present as a harmless and enjoyable game. Misled by their seemingly sincere apology, Freya accepts the invitation, unaware that their true intention is to entrap and bury her alive. In one of the novel’s most intense scenes, Freya is confined within a

wooden chest that is subsequently closed and buried in a construction waste pit. She describes the moment as one where “everything went black” and reports being unable to react immediately, it is an indication of deep psychological shock (Boyne, 2024, p. 58). Upon realizing that the chest is being nailed shut from the outside, Freya is overwhelmed by panic. She screams, bangs on the lid, and imagines her own death, which highlights the terror of physical entrapment and the existential threat it represents, making this a traumatic experience.

Psychological trauma causes victims to lose their sense of safety, trust and control over their lives (Herman, 2015). In the quote, Freya is not only faced with physical danger, but she is also emotionally betrayed by individuals she believed to be remorseful. As she said “I screamed and continued to push at the roof.. I told myself. This was how I was going to die. Buried alive” (Boyne, 2024, p. 58), the feeling of helplessness and deep isolation is palpable. It captures the intense psychological wounds caused by the event. The trauma makes Freya a person who fears of enclosed spaces, destabilizes her core sense of security and contributes to the development of long-term psychological defenses, including repression and projection, which will be examined in the following sub-chapter.

In addition, Freya is also traumatized by emotional neglect and rejection from parental figures, who should be a source of love and protection. Her father leaves before she is born, and her mother, Beth, abandons her at the age of one. Although Freya is allowed to visit her mother briefly every two months during the summer, these encounters are marked by continued neglect. This lack of consistent love and protection from parental figures, typically a crucial source of emotional stability during early childhood, compounds Freya’s psychological vulnerability and contributes to her later behavioral and emotional disturbances.

Datum 3

By the time we reached the small cottage she rented by the sea, the tears with which she’d greeted me had been replaced by eye-rolls and muttered asides if I asked too many questions, spoke too loudly, sang along with the radio, breathed too heavily, sniffed, coughed, scratched, opened the window, closed the window, did anything, in fact, to remind her of my existence. Instead of feeling welcome in her home or being overcompensated for her lack of maternal

affection across the other ten months of the year, I always went to bed on my first night aware that she was counting down the days until I could be dispatched back to Norfolk. (Boyne, 2024, p. 29)

In datum 3, it shows Freya being neglected by her mother, Beth. The interaction between Freya and her mother is filled with tension and discomfort. What initially appears to be a warm moment “tears with which she'd greeted me” quickly turns into an impatient, cynical, even obnoxious attitude towards Freya's existence. Freya notes how her mother is bothered by things as small as “breathed too heavily, sniffed, coughed, scratched, opened the window, closed the window” showing that Freya's presence is considered a burden, not a joy. The sentence “did anything, in fact, to remind her of my existence” emphasizes how her existence is not only ignored, but also subtly but painfully rejected. The mother's attitude of counting the days until Freya returns to Norfolk emphasizes that affection is temporary, conditional, and insincere, thus strengthening Freya's inner pain. The absence of maternal and paternal affection makes Freya live in the shadow of rejection, forming a pattern of long-term trauma in the form of anxiety and difficulty establishing healthy relationships. This condition also causes Freya to develop self-defense mechanisms such as denial and projection.

Before her traumatic experience, Freya's id was mostly composed of childlike desires and emotions.

Datum 4

Before I met Arthur and Pascoe, I would spend my afternoons strolling up and down the beach, paddling in the water, and, on sunny days, changing into my swimsuit beneath a towel before swimming as far out as I dared, which wasn't far, as although I loved the water I had a terrible fear of sharks. (Hannah's favourite movie was Jaws and whenever it was on television she made me sit down to watch it with her, even though she knew that it gave me nightmares.) (Boyne, 2024, p. 31)

Datum 5

Sometimes, I would observe other families on holidays, fathers, mothers and their children splashing around in the waves, building sandcastles, eating picnic lunches, and wished that I could be among them. I would have liked a brother or sister, someone for me to take care of, or someone who might take care of me, but when I asked Beth whether she would ever give me one, she said that she'd sorted

that problem out years ago because being a mother was the hardest job in the world and she didn't intend doing it twice, even though, to my mind, she had barely done it once. (Boyne, 2024, p. 31)

It is shown in datum 4 dan datum 5, like any child, she is eager to explore the world around her. She likely sought fun, joy, and comfort. She craves love, security, and parental affection, which were part of her emotional instincts. She wants to live his life like normal children, living and playing with his parents. At this stage, her id is normal and not destructive, mainly driven by a need for love and safety.

However, the childhood psychological traumas experienced by the character Freya, that is sexual abuse and the experience of being buried alive, as indicated in datum 1 and datum 2, have shaped and altered her Id drives. These traumatic experiences play a role in motivating Freya's drive to repeat the pattern of violence in other forms. The Id impulses formed from these traumas drive Freya to commit predatory acts, such as controlling and abusing young boys, which can be interpreted as a projection of her childhood trauma. This is further illustrated in datum 6, when Freya describes feeling "that intoxicating rush, that overwhelming thirst for revenge, that tells me I have no choice but to see this through" (Boyne, 2024, p. 27). Freya's Id not only drives her to act impulsively, but also creates a desire to avenge her past wounds. This impulse reflects unresolved anger and resentment, particularly directed toward Arthur and Pascoe, which in turn motivates her to act without considering morality.

In Freya's case, the ego serves as a tool to hide her dark side. It is seen in her professional life as a highly respected burn specialist in her adulthood. That she is still able to maintain her image as a competent and dedicated doctor show that the ego helps her conform to social norms. Although driven by the id, Freya does not act recklessly. Ego is able to make her manipulate the situation to stay safe and not easily suspected. However, the ego in her is not strong enough to control the id completely, it only serves as a social mask without changing its drive.

In Freya, the superego seems to be underdeveloped. Freud in *The Ego and the Id* (2019) explains that the child's relationship with parents, especially the mother, plays a central role in the formation of the id, ego and superego personality

structures. Explained in datum 1-3, Freya's childhood is filled with trauma and neglect as her mother abandoned her, while her grandmother did not provide adequate emotional support. The lack of nurturing and morality instilled early on left her with no guilt or remorse for her actions. This weak superego leaves Freya with no moral control, which further strengthens the dominance of the id within her.

In this context, Freya is dominated by the id, which drives her to commit cruel acts. The ego only functions as a social mask, not as a controller of the id, while the weak superego leaves her without enough moral control to stop her actions. This imbalance makes Freya a tragic and frightening character, someone who seems successful and professional but harbors uncontrollable dark urges.

4.2 The Impact of Childhood Psychological Trauma on Freya's Attitude Development

Childhood psychological trauma, encompassing experiences such as sexual abuse, physical abuse and verbal abuse constitutes a critical factor that can significantly disrupt a child's emotional and psychological development. These traumatic experiences often leave enduring effects on the formation of attitudes, influencing how individuals perceive themselves, relate to others, and interpret life circumstances. The impact of such trauma is shaped by several factors, including the family environment, nature of the event, and duration of the experience, as well as other social situations (Briere et al., 2008)

As Freud explained in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (2015), unresolved trauma may continue to influence an individual's attitude unconsciously. In the case of Freya Petrus, the protagonist of John Boyne's *Fire*, the psychological trauma she experiences during childhood has lasting impact, shaping her attitude into adulthood.

Drawing upon Freudian psychoanalytic theory, the ego is the mediator between the id and the superego. The ego attempts to "satisfy" both the id and the superego by balancing their demands. When the id and the superego are in conflict, it will create anxiety. In instances where anxiety becomes overwhelming, the ego will employ various forms of defense mechanisms to maintain psychological

stability. These mechanisms also play crucial role in shaping an individual's emotional, social, and moral responses, directly influencing the development of their attitude towards oneself, others and life situations.

Freya's experiences of sexual abuse, burial alive, and parental neglect activate the ego defense mechanism, including repression, projection, denial, displacement, sublimation, rationalization, reaction formation, and identification. These mechanisms are used by Freya in an effort to manage her anxiety; handle her guilt, fear, anger; and also protect her self-esteem. Consequently, her attitude towards herself, others, and her environment is shaped by this psychological strategy, which reflects an internal negotiation with her traumatic past.

This section discusses about Freya's attitude development across three distinct phases of her life: early, teenage, and adulthood, by examining how her ego defense mechanisms manifest in response to the enduring impact of her childhood trauma.

4.2.1 Freya's Ego Defense Mechanisms in Early Phase

One of the most traumatic events in Freya's life is when she is sexually assaulted and buried alive by two fourteen-year-old boys, Arthur and Pascoe. Although this event is only revealed in the middle of the novel through flashbacks, it is a major source of psychological trauma that later shapes Freya's attitudes throughout the narrative. The earliest ego defense mechanism that emerges as a result of this incident is repression.

a. Repression

Repression is a psychological defense mechanism that emerges in response to traumatic experiences. This defense represses traumatic experiences that become memories into the unconscious. After being abused and buried alive by Arthur and Pasco, Freya shows signs of repression through her tendency to repress the memory of the incident into the unconscious. Freya never mentions or talks about the incident directly to anyone, even to those closest to her. This is illustrated in the following quote:

Datum 7

Beth didn't notice my change of mood, but Eli did and asked me about it. I wanted to confide in him but worried that if he knew the things I'd been doing, then he would want to do them with me too. After this, I didn't see them for three days and, despite myself, felt even lonelier than ever, wondering whether I had made a mistake. (Boyne, 2024, p. 56)

The quote above shows that Freya's mother, Beth, is unaware of Freya's mood changes. In contrast, Beth's boyfriend, Eli, notices the shift in her mood and expresses concern by asking Freya about it. Freya faces a dilemma between the desire to open up and the fear of the consequences that such a confession might bring. She feels that if Eli were to find out "the things I'd been doing," he might be tempted to do the same to her, that is something she fears or considers undesirable. Freya is afraid that Eli might rape her, just as Arthur and Pascoe did. Because of this fear, Freya chooses to hold back and keep her problems hidden.

It indicates a repression defense mechanism used by Freya. It also shows that Freya's past experiences laid the foundation for her tendency to be withdrawn and defensive in social interactions. This moment also marks the beginning of Freya's fear of men. Thus, repression is not only a defense mechanism but also a key factor in the development of Freya's personality structure after the trauma. This repression also serves as the starting point for the development of other defense mechanisms.

b. Rationalization

Rationalization is a type of defense mechanism in which an individual seeks logical justification for actions that are actually unacceptable, whether morally or emotionally. This mechanism aims to reduce feelings of guilt or anxiety by altering the perception of those actions. In Freya's life narrative, rationalization emerges as a defense mechanism following repression. After experiencing sexual abuse by Arthur and Pascoe, Freya continues to have sexual relations with them throughout the summer. Although, deep down, Freya does not want these encounters, she continues due to coercion and a fear of being lonely again. Freya tries to justify her

actions through the process of rationalization. This is reflected in the following quote:

Datum 8

I didn't enjoy it, but I was worried that they would abandon me. I was twelve and desperately lonely. Thanks to Hannah's insistence on my being her unpaid servant, I'd never been allowed to have a friend, let alone two of them. Perhaps this, I told myself, is what good girls did for their friends. (Boyne, 2024, p. 56)

In datum 8, it is evident that Freya did not enjoy the sexual intercourse. However, her fear of being abandoned by Arthur and Pascoe compels her to endure them. She believes that if she does not fulfill their demands, she will be left behind and no longer be accepted as their friend. This reflects Freya's anxiety about returning to the loneliness she experienced prior to the summer of her twelfth year. The extreme sense of isolation she had endured since childhood, largely due to Hannah's strict supervision, make the presence of Arthur and Pascoe feel deeply significant to her. In an effort to preserve these relationships, Freya attempts to convince herself that her actions are a form of loyalty, a way for a "good girl" to treat her friends. The sentence "Perhaps this, I told myself, is what good girls did for their friends" illustrates Freya's use of rationalization, in which she reinterprets the abuse perpetrated by Arthur and Pascoe as something "normal" or a "valuable" act expected from a friend. She believes that a good girl will do whatever her friends want. This attitude demonstrates Freya's tendency to justify or provide morally or socially acceptable reasons for an experience that was, in truth, painful and ethically wrong. Through this rationalization, she frames her actions not as those of a victim of abuse, but as sacrifices made to preserve a friendship. In this context, Freya's rationalization serves to reduce her feelings of guilt and anxiety regarding the actions she performed under coercion.

In addition to experiencing trauma from sexual abuse, Freya also faces another form of emotional suffering, that is neglect by her parents. Although her mother, Beth, is physically present, Freya does not receive the affection she should have from a mother. During the summer holidays she spends at home, Freya continues to be emotionally neglected by Beth. The lack of attention and affection

from her mother creates a deep emotional void within Freya. In this state of emotional deprivation, the only person who shows her any care is Eli, Beth's boyfriend.

Throughout the summer, Freya and Eli develop an emotional closeness that becomes deeply meaningful for her. Freya does not see Eli merely as a friend but as the only person who truly cares about her. This emotional attachment eventually grows into feelings of romantic interest, to the point that Freya fantasizes about Eli leaving Beth to be with her. In one of their interactions, Freya expresses her feelings to Eli just days before returning to Norfolk. She tells him that she likes him while also making a physical advance by trying to touch his thigh. However, Eli, who sees Freya as a daughter figure, is shocked and views her act as inappropriate. Eli's rejection comes as a surprise to Freya, leaving her hurt and ashamed as a result of his response. Following this incident, Freya engages in rationalization to cope with the emotional impact of her rejected advance. As illustrated in datum 9, she gets shock and responds Eli by stating, "You can relax... You're an old man, you're nothing special, and I have no interest in Beth's cast-offs" (Boyne, 2024, p. 100). She immediately tries to shift the situation by claiming that she was never truly interested in Eli, describing him as an old man who is not special. She attempts to explain or justify her withdrawal by stating that she is not attracted to "Beth's cast-offs." This is a form of the defense mechanism known as rationalization. Freya employs this mechanism to mask the shame and emotional pain caused by the rejection, to avoid acknowledging her unreciprocated feelings, and to preserve her self-esteem by reframing the situation as if she were the one rejecting Eli, rather than being rejected herself.

This rationalization mechanism aligns with Freud's theory of ego defense mechanisms, in which an individual attempts to alter the perception of painful reality by providing logical or socially acceptable justifications. In this context, Freya uses rationalization as a means of protecting herself from the emotional failure she has experienced. Thus, the form of rationalization Freya engages in within her relationship with Eli illustrates how the experience of parental neglect

has shaped her approach to interpersonal relationships, which is marked by a deep need for recognition and love.

After the traumatic events and being rejected by Eli, Freya increasingly feels that no one truly cares about her. With only one day left before returning to Norfolk, her mother, Beth, promises to spend the evening with her. However, that promise is broken. Instead, Beth goes to a pub with Kitto Teague, Arthur and Pascoe's father, and ends up spending the night at his house. This incident triggers a deep sense of disgust and anger within Freya. Ultimately, in the early hours of Saturday morning, while everyone is asleep, Freya engages in a destructive act by setting fire to the Teague family's house. The following quote illustrates Freya's actions:

Datum 10

Returning downstairs, I went into the garage, where the fuse box was located, along with a dozen cans of paint and various flammable materials. From my pocket, I took out Eli's lighter, holding it in a handkerchief so my fingerprints wouldn't overwrite his, and found a bottle of methylated spirits, which I splashed around the floor. Pulling a few wires from the fuses, I lit one, and it connected quickly, igniting others, before feasting on the flammable liquid on the floor. I stepped away, watching as it burst into life. It was a beautiful sight to behold ... Before returning to the cottage, I made sure to drop the lighter in the grass, somewhere a little hidden but easy enough for the police to find. Eli deserved this. He could have saved me but had chosen not to, so he could take his punishment too. And most importantly, Arthur and Pascoe, those two malevolent fourteen-year-olds, never made it to fifteen, and never got to hurt anyone again. (Boyne, 2024, pp. 101-102)

In the quoted passage, Freya consciously commits arson, which results in the deaths of Beth, Arthur, Pascoe, and their father, Kitto Teague. Freya also deliberately plants false evidence to shift the blame onto Eli. She manipulates the evidence by using Eli's lighter and placing it where it would be found. This act is both criminal and destructive, something that is entirely unacceptable in society. In this narrative, Freya employs rationalization as an ego defense mechanism to justify her criminal actions. By stating "Eli deserved this... so he could take his punishment too" and "Arthur and Pascoe... never got to hurt anyone again," she constructs a moral justification for her crime, as if she were acting in the name of justice or to protect others from becoming victims like herself. Freya avoids

confronting the harsh reality that she has committed brutal murder. This creates an illusion of moral righteousness, when in fact, her primary motivation is personal revenge. Freya uses this rationalization to reduce her guilt and internal anxiety, while also preserving her self-image, even though her actions clearly constitute a socially and ethically unacceptable crime.

4.2.2 Freya's Ego Defense Mechanisms in Teenage

In *Fire*, John Boyne provides glimpses into Freya's teenage years through flashbacks. After the house fire incident, she returns to her grandmother's home in Norfolk to live out her teenage. Although still haunted by the trauma of her past, Freya demonstrates an ability to redirect much of her negative impulses into more positive and productive activities. During this teenage phase, the dominant ego defense mechanism employed by Freya is sublimation.

a. Sublimation

In the psychoanalytic theory developed by Sigmund Freud, sublimation is one of the most adaptive forms of ego defense mechanisms. Sublimation is defined as the process of redirecting socially unacceptable urges or impulses such as aggression, sexual urges, or guilt into activities that are positive, productive, and acceptable within societal norms, such as art, sports, or professional work (Feist et al., 2018). These mechanism enables individuals to cope with internal conflicts and traumatic experiences in a healthier and more constructive way than other mechanisms that tend to be repressive or harmful.

Sublimation is considered the most mature ego defense mechanism. According to Freud, only a small number of individuals are consistently able to use it. This suggests that most people tend to rely on less mature defense mechanisms. This idea aligns with Freud's theory of personality development, which states that humans are born with the id, followed by the development of the ego and superego over time. The id seeks immediate gratification, and its dominance in early life influences the maturity level of the defense mechanisms an individual is likely to use (A. Freud, 2018).

In *Fire*, a novel by John Boyne, the protagonist Freya offers a strong representation of sublimation as a psychological response to her past trauma. The narrative reveals that Freya harbors a dark history, having been directly involved in an act of house burning that resulted in the death of her mother, as well as other characters such as Arthur, Pascoe, and their father. This act not only illustrates destructive behavior but also exposes the dark side of Freya's personality, particularly her lack of remorse or guilt at the time. Rather than fear or regret, she experiences a sense of pleasure as she watches the flames, as shown in her reflection: "I stepped away, watching as it burst into life. It was a beautiful sight to behold" (Boyne, 2024, p. 101). This line reveals that she found satisfaction watching something burn. Such brutality is, of course, deemed unacceptable by societal norms.

Faced with the dark impulses and societal norms, in her teenage years, she eventually chooses to redirect her impulses into something socially acceptable and constructive by pursuing a medical education, specializing in burns and skin grafts, which is a field that symbolically closely tied to the past incident. By choosing to specialize in burns, Freya does not distance herself from fire; rather, she transforms her fascination and destructive impulses into a means of healing. Upon completing her studies, she becomes a successful and professional doctor at a hospital, known for her composure and precision when treating burn victims. This is exemplified in the following quote:

Datum 11

When I have to deal with the emotions of children who have suffered in conflagrations, their skin blistered, their features distorted, their nerve endings either severed or screaming out in unendurable pain, I do so in the company of their parents and a nurse – usually Louise – along with one of the hospital's paediatric therapists, where I remain composed and professional throughout. (Boyne, 2024, p. 13)

Datum 11 illustrates how Freya carries out her profession calmly and professionally, especially when dealing with child patients who have severe burn injuries. Her calm and controlled attitude demonstrates her ability to separate personal emotions from professional responsibilities. However, behind this

calmness lies a deeper psychological narrative: a deep familiarity and unconscious affinity with burns.

Freya's actions are not only show personal recovery, but also reflect the process of identity construction. Through her work, she builds a socially acceptable image as a highly dedicated medical professional while concealing her dark and cruel side. It becomes a social mask that protects her from accusations for the fire incident at that time. In this sense, sublimation becomes not just a defense mechanism but also a strategic reconstruction of self in the eyes of society.

4.2.3 Freya's Ego Defense Mechanisms in Adulthood

As she enters adulthood, Freya builds a life as a doctor working in a hospital. In the narrative of the novel, Freya is portrayed as being thirty-six years old. Although she has successfully established a stable professional career, the darkness of her past continues to leave a mark on her emotional and psychological life. Freya grows into an individual who suffers from the fear of enclosed spaces, paranoia toward men, and displays tendencies of psychopathic behavior.

Unlike during her teenage, in adulthood Freya exhibits a wider range of ego defense mechanisms in more complex forms. These defense mechanisms not only function to protect her from guilt, anxiety, or past trauma, but also shape her interactions with others and influence how she perceives herself within her professional world. This sub sub-chapter will explore the various types of ego defense mechanisms Freya uses in her adult life and how these psychological strategies impact the course of her life and the development of her attitudes.

a. Repression

Repression is one of the defense mechanisms used to reduce her fear and anxiety. This mechanism operates by pushing traumatic experiences into the unconscious memory. Although Freya's traumatic experiences occurred during her childhood, in adulthood she continues to repress those memories into her unconscious. Even though these memories are not consciously recalled, the

emotional and physiological responses to the trauma can still manifest. This is illustrated in several of the following events.

One morning, she faces a problem that the stairs she often uses is undergoing repairs. Therefore, she is forced to take the elevator.

Datum 12

This morning, however, workmen are repairing the staircase between the ground and first floors of the hospital, leaving me with no choice but to make my way up to the burns unit in the lift. And, to make matters worse, I'm not alone. They exit on the fourth floor – Renal – while I continue up to the sixth, exhaling in relief when the doors finally open, a slight prickle of perspiration tickling my back. (Boyne, 2024, p. 7)

The quote tells that Freya is forced to take the elevator to get to her office because the stairs she used to use is being repaired. She takes the elevator with other people, a father and his son. Freya thinks that riding an elevator with a man and a boy is a bad situation that she has to face. The situation which is depicted in datum 12, indicates that Freya develops a certain attitude to deal with that situation. It shows that Freya uses the defense mechanism of repression when she faces the problem. Freya represses her fear of enclosed space when she rides the elevator to her office in the burn unit. The reason Freya is afraid of riding the elevator is because of the trauma Freya experienced in her childhood, being buried alive in a wooden chest by Arthur and Pascoe, which makes her a person who is fear of enclosed spaces. Freya tries to press her fear by shifting the focus of her mind to the destination floor sign and other people by feeling uncomfortable with their presence in the elevator, instead of acknowledging or realizing the anxiety she has. She also tries to hide her anxiety from a father and son who ride the elevator with her. She tries to keep her fear until she finally gets off the elevator. She reacted by “exhaling in relief,” which indicates a feeling of relief, and “a slight prickle of perspiration tickling my back,” which indicates a physical stress or anxiety response.

The following day, when she meets Borje, Vidar's father who works as a construction laborer, Freya once again experiences repression, as reflected in datum 13, when she recalls that the encounter triggers “memories of Arthur and Pascoe,

and the building site in Cornwall where they buried me alive” (Boyne, 2024, p. 17). As she treats Vidar, a young boy with advanced burns who allegedly pressed his own right hand into an electric stove, she also represses her traumatic memory when she knows that Vidar's father is a construction worker. It recalls her traumatic childhood memories of Freya being buried alive at a building site by Arthur and Pascoe. However, Freya's memory appears briefly without describing explicit feelings. It indicates that Freya uses repression to reduce her anxiety about anything related to building construction while treating Vidar, although the emotional effects still appear in the form of antipathy towards Borje, Vidar's father.

Freya also experiences repression when she sees two young boys and a little girl playing on her way back to her apartment.

Datum 14

Two boys and a girl are playing Rock Paper Scissors and she apparently loses to both, because they whoop and holler and high-five each other. When the trio walks away, turning down a side street, I wonder where they're taking her, what consequence her loss involved, and only the aggressive beeping of the car behind me when the workmen allow us to drive on stops me from pulling in and following them to protect her. (Boyne, 2024, p. 26)

In datum 14, Freya's anxiety related to the experience of sexual abuse makes her highly sensitive to situations similar to what she has experienced. As she watches the interaction of two boys and the girl playing, Freya represses her own memories of childhood sexual abuse with Arthur and Pascoe. Freya's feelings of fear, anxiety and urge to protect the girl appear impulsively and emotionally, with no strong rational reason on the surface. It shows that traumatic memories or feelings related to her past have been repressed by the ego, but it still influences her behavior and perception in dealing with similar situations. In other words, her traumatic memory has not completely disappeared, but is only absent from her consciousness and reappears in the form of her excessive concern towards others.

This kind of anxiety from fear of enclosed space reappears when she rides the elevator in her apartment with Rufus. Datum 15 captures this moment as Freya narrates, “We make our way towards the lift and I inhale the universal scent of teenage boy: perspiration, anxiety and Lynx. Closing my eyes as we ascend towards

the twelfth floor, I breathe carefully, as I always do when I'm trapped in enclosed spaces" (Boyne, 2024, p. 40). This scene illustrates that Freya is in riding the elevator with Rufus, a fourteen-year-old young boy, who becomes one of her targets of revenge. Although her traumatic memory of being buried alive is not explicitly recalled in this moment, her actions of closing her eyes and controlling her breathing suggests an attempt to repress the fear triggered by the enclosed space. Her focus on the smell of Rufus may also act as a distraction or grounding mechanism to avoid succumbing to panic. This reaction demonstrates a coping mechanism she has developed to manage her anxiety in enclosed spaces, revealing the lingering effects of her unresolved trauma.

In addition, Freya demonstrates repression when dealing with Rufus and shows a strong aversion to boys with acne on their faces, which link to her traumatic past. Datum 16 illustrates this when she observes, "I walk towards him. His skin is remarkably clear. I can tell that he's the sort of boy who isn't going to suffer acne and wonder what he'll look like when he's older. Right now, he's neither a boy nor a proper teenager. (Boyne, 2024, p. 41). In this moment, Freya represses her negative emotions when walking towards Rufus and confirms whether Rufus is a boy who will have acne on his face or not. She appears to fixate on Rufus's clear skin, which contrasts with her past experiences with Arthur and Pascoe, who are implied to have had acne during their adolescence. By focusing on this physical detail and refraining from recalling the trauma explicitly, she represses her fear and memories, allowing her to maintain emotional distance while interacting with him.

During her time as a doctor, Freya maintains a closed-off attitude regarding her personal life, particularly in her interaction with her colleague, Louise. This is reflected in datum 17, where Freya admits, "So many times over the years she's asked me about my life and my relationships outside work, and I've never been very forthcoming, which is probably why she eventually stopped" (Boyne, 2024, p. 88). This admission highlights Freya's tendency to withhold her personal life even from those close to her. Rather than confront or share her past experiences, she chooses to remain emotionally distant. Her consistent avoidance of such discussion suggests a form of repression, as she appears to push memories and experienced

into her unconscious, choosing silence as a way to avoid confronting her traumatic past.

b. Denial

After using repression as a mechanism to push traumatic memories into her unconscious, Freya also applies another form of ego defense, namely denial. Unlike repression, which works by repressing memories unconsciously, denial involves a conscious refusal to accept the reality or traumatic events that actually occurred. Denial is defined as a form of defense mechanism that people use to release excess anxiety by believing the unpleasant event does not exist and never happened. In some instances, Freya uses this defense mechanism to release her excessive anxiety.

In the novel *Fire*, Freya's use of denial is evident in her interactions with others, especially when confronted with triggers that recall her traumatic past. The following quotes illustrate her application of this mechanism:

Datum 18

His son's file tells me that he's a construction worker, which might go some way to explain my immediate antipathy to him, as it recalls memories of Arthur and Pascoe, and the building site in Cornwall where they buried me alive. But he does not frighten me. Men do not frighten me. If anything, it's them who should feel nervous. (Boyne, 2024, p. 17)

The background story in datum 18 is the same as that described in datum 13, this story occurs when Freya encounters Vidar's father, a construction worker who is characterized as a well-built man with a shaved head, a thick neck, hard shoulders, and a tattoo on his neck. As demonstrated in the analysis of datum 13, following the implementation of repression, Freya employs a defense strategy of denial. The sentence "But he does not frighten me. Men do not frighten me" shows as a form of denial. She keeps saying that she is not afraid of Borje and convinces herself that she is not afraid by repeating the words "not frighten me" to reduce her anxiety and fear. When in fact she is afraid. Freya denies that she is afraid of Vidar's father who has a construction worker background and is physically dominant compared to her.

In addition, Freya also displays a defensive attitude and uses the defense mechanism of denial when faced with a situation that demands her to acknowledge the rape of Aaron.

Datum 19

‘I don’t know why you’re telling me all this,’ I say, and he shakes his head.

‘Yes, you do,’ he replies. ‘I can see from the expression on your face that you do. Please don’t play the innocent. It’s sort of pathetic.’

‘I don’t know what you think you remember,’ I say, and he raises a hand to silence me. For the first time since his arrival in the hospital, I obey him without question. (Boyne, 2024, p. 114)

In datum 19, Freya is faced with a situation where she meets Aaron who says that he was raped by Freya when he was fourteen years old. In this situation, Freya denied Aaron's statement that he had raped her. Freya feigns ignorance of the incident by saying “I don't know why you're telling me all this” and “I don't know what you think you remember”. These two statements are also a form of direct verbal denial by Freya of the rape that she is aware of or remembers, but does not want to face or admit. This attitude shows that Freya rejects responsibility for her actions and rejects the reality of the memories that Aaron is trying to bring to the surface. Freya uses this mechanism to protect herself from guilt and fear of punishment rather than rape which is a moral conflict that could degrade her image as a doctor.

c. Reaction Formation

In addition to denial, Freya also exhibits another form of ego defense, such as reaction formation, where she displays an attitude opposite to her true feelings in order to protect herself from internal anxiety. Reaction formation is a defense mechanism in which an individual replaces unacceptable impulses or feelings with behaviors that are the opposite (A. Freud, 2018). In Freya's context, this mechanism is seen in how she presents behaviors that contradict her true fears, hatred, or aggressive impulses. There are several quotations that illustrate how Freya uses this defense mechanism, particularly in her interactions with male characters in the story.

The first instance of reaction formation displayed by Freya occurs when she meets George Eliot, a fourteen-year-old boy. At the time, George Eliot is sitting quietly on a park bench, reflecting on his friend Harry, who is being treated at the hospital for cancer. Seeing George lost in thought, Freya becomes curious and decides to approach him.

Datum 20

He studiously avoids looking at me. Teenage boys never want to look fragile in front of girls or women. When they talk about us with their friends, they can be ruthless and demeaning, speaking of us as little more than bodies to be used or experimented upon for their pleasure, but when they're alone with someone of the opposite sex, their intrinsic terror and total spinelessness assert themselves. They are monsters, every one of them, utterly devoid of decency. 'I sometimes have to treat people your and Harry's age,' I tell him, cautiously placing a hand on his while not wanting to frighten him away. (Boyne, 2024, p. 13)

In this quotation, Freya internally displays a cynical and hateful attitude toward young boys. She views them as emotionless, cruel beings who see women as mere objects. However, despite her mind being filled with negative feelings, Freya's external actions are quite the opposite. She gently touches George's hand while speaking soft and calming words. This is illustrated in the sentence, "'I sometimes have to treat people your and Harry's age,' I tell him, cautiously placing a hand on his while not wanting to frighten him away". This demonstrates reaction formation, where Freya uses an ego defense mechanism by displaying an empathetic gesture externally, even though internally she harbors intense hatred toward men. Freya creates a positive, caring expression externally toward George Eliot, while internally, she holds anger, cynicism, and disgust toward men. This is Freya's ego's attempt to cover up her hateful impulses or inner conflicts that cannot be socially or morally accepted.

The following day, Freya confronts Borje, who is Vidar's father. In this interaction, Freya demonstrates the use of the ego defense mechanism of reaction formation.

Datum 21

His son's file tells me that he's a construction worker, which might go some way to explain my immediate antipathy to him, as it recalls memories of Arthur and Pascoe, and the building site in Cornwall where they buried me alive. But he does not frighten me. Men do not frighten me. If anything, it's them who should feel nervous. (Boyne, 2024, p. 17)

The background of datum 21 is the same as explained in datum 13 and 18. In this quotation, Freya reveals that the antipathy she feels toward Borje, a construction worker, is triggered by traumatic memories related to her past negative experiences, particularly at a construction site in Cornwall. Although the trauma reminds Freya of fear and helplessness, she responds to these feelings with an aggressive and dominant attitude. The statement "If anything, it's them who should feel nervous" can be understood as an expression of reaction formation, where Freya, instead of showing the fear that may still linger from her experience at the construction site, adopts a position as if she holds power in the situation.

In other words, although Freya internally feels fear and anxiety toward Borje, she chooses to exhibit an aggressive and dominant attitude. This demonstrates the use of reaction formation, a response that is opposite to the true feelings, where Freya covers her fear and anxiety by showing a more courageous and stronger demeanor. This is Freya's attempt to cope with the inner conflict, which cannot be socially or morally accepted, by displaying control and power over a tense situation.

After treating Vidar's burn injuries, Freya thinks that the burns were not caused by Vidar's own actions, but by Borje's behavior. Freya suspects that Borje had pressed Vidar's hand onto the electric stove, causing the burns. However, Borje insists that he was not involved in the incident. On the other hand, Freya does not believe Borje's explanation and remains convinced that Borje was the primary cause of Vidar's burn injuries. The debate between the two is reflected in the following quotation:

Datum 22

Fuck you, I think.
I will destroy your life.

I will bury you alive.

'He's tired,' says Sharon, lifting the child slightly off her lap. 'He needs to be in his own bed.'

'No,' I say. 'You can forget that. Your explanation makes no sense. So, you can tell me everything now, or I can go outside and call the police and let them get to the bottom of it. It's your choice.' (Boyne, 2024, p. 19)

In the situation described in datum 22, Freya faces an emotionally charged debate regarding the cause of Vidar's burns. Although Freya is actually very angry with Borje, she manages to remain calm and professional. It indicates that Freya is using the defense mechanism of reaction formation. Internally, Freya feels angry and has an intense desire to vent her frustration on Borje, even to the extreme thought of burning him alive. However, as a professional and a doctor, Freya understands that expressing such anger is morally and socially unacceptable. Therefore, she replaces this emotional impulse with calmness and maintains her professionalism. Freya remains assertive when Vidar's mother, Sharon, tries to take her son home, but she does not show intense anger in her actions. This behavior demonstrates that Freya is exhibiting actions that are opposite to her true emotional impulses. Thus, the use of reaction formation in this context represents Freya's attempt to manage her anger in a more controlled manner while still adhering to social and professional norms that do not permit excessive expressions of anger.

The next day, Freya is approached by Hugh Winley as she is about to go to work. Hugh Winley is a neighbor of Freya's in the apartment building and is known as a children's television show host. Despite living close by, Hugh's presence unsettles Freya. When interacting with Hugh Winley, she displays reaction formation.

Datum 23

In the underground garage, I'm walking towards my car when I see Hugh Winley coming towards me. Hugh moved into the apartment above my own earlier this year and, unlike the other residents, who tend to keep themselves to themselves, has an irritating habit of trying to engage me in conversation. I've done my best to keep him at bay while not being rude, but he's persistent. (Boyne, 2024, p. 24)

In datum 23, it is evident that Freya displays a form of reaction formation when she encounters Hugh Winley in the underground garage. In the quote, Freya

expresses that she is disturbed by Hugh due to his persistent attempts to engage her in conversation, unlike the other residents of the apartment who maintain their distance. Although she feels bothered, Freya tries to remain polite and not rude, which shows the difference between her internal impulses and external expressions. The statement “I’ve done my best to keep him at bay while not being rude, but he’s persistent,” it can be concluded that Freya is repressing feelings of hatred, anxiety, or discomfort that arise from Hugh's presence. Instead of directly showing her dislike, she chooses to remain polite and maintain a passive distance. This strategy reflects an ego defense mechanism to avoid social conflict by replacing negative emotional responses with polite behavior. This is a key characteristic of reaction formation. Furthermore, Freya’s true feelings are influenced by the traumatic background she experienced earlier, particularly in relation to men. This strengthens the likelihood that reaction formation becomes an important defense tool for her in dealing with male figures whom she perceives as threatening or irritating but whom she must confront in daily life.

Freya finds herself in a psychologically stressful situation after she had previously been sexually assaulted by George Eliot. In this situation, George takes advantage of the situation and threatens Freya, causing her to feel trapped in a forced relationship. Freya reluctantly complies with George's desire to continue having sexual relations with him. George proposes a plan to spend time together, while Freya's internal response is in stark contrast to her verbal expression.

Datum 24

‘I don’t know. A bunch. We could watch all the old ones here across a few nights – I could stay over – and then go to the IMAX to see the new one. What do you think?’

I think that I’d rather dig a hole to the centre of the earth with my tongue.

‘Sure,’ I say. ‘Sounds like a plan.’ (Boyne, 2024, p. 82)

Datum 24 shows that Freya uses the defense mechanism of reaction formation. In this excerpt, although Freya internally feels disgusted and rejects George's presence, saying, “I’d rather dig a hole to the centre of the earth with my tongue,” she verbally agrees with George's plan by saying, “Sure” and “Sounds like a plan.” It shows an expression that is opposite to her actual emotions, as a way to

maintain stability in an emotionally burdensome and potentially dangerous situation. Through this mechanism, Freya attempts to maintain control over herself in the midst of psychological pressure and the manipulative and threatening relationship with George. This response reflects the internal condition of a victim who is still struggling to survive in an emotionally and physically unsafe situation. The use of this defense mechanism illustrates the complex dynamics between trauma, guilt, and self-protection efforts.

In this situation, Freya feels trapped and lacks direct power to escape the coercive relationship. In response, she strategizes to kill George but hides her intentions by expressing affection and sincerity verbally.

Datum 25

They say that the easiest way to hide something is to do it in plain sight. Which is what I do. The following evening, I message to apologize for not responding to any of his messages, telling him I had an emergency surgery, turned my phone off, and just fell into bed exhausted when I got home. I feel the same way, I tell him. That the age difference between us doesn't matter. That he's the best lover I've ever had. That when I look to the future, all I see is me and him together. That I only want to be with him. And then, finally, I tell him that I want him to come to my flat at nine o'clock tonight and that I'll make it up to him for keeping him waiting so long. (Boyne, 2024, p. 108)

The dominant defense mechanism apparent in datum 25 is reaction formation. In this excerpt, Freya actually hates and feels threatened by George. She has also devised a plan to kill him as a form of regaining control over the oppressive situation. However, verbally, Freya expresses love, admiration, and a desire to build a future together with George. Freya replaces her feelings of hatred and anger toward George with extreme expressions of love as a form of protection against external threats and internal conflict. Phrases such as “you're the best lover I've ever had” and “all I see is me and him together” are expressions that are in direct contrast to her internal motivation of wanting to free herself through extreme measures. In this case, the expression of love serves as a mask to conceal her murderous intentions and maintain her psychological state amidst the pressure she is experiencing.

On the day she plans to carry out the murder of George, Freya once again demonstrates the use of the defense mechanism of reaction formation. After previously establishing a seemingly warm and caring interaction through text messages, Freya continues this strategy directly when George arrives at her apartment. In this situation, Freya greets George with a controlled and insincere attitude, even though internally, she is suppressing a very strong aggressive impulse. As illustrated in datum 26: “‘Hi, bae,’ he says when I open the front door, and it takes every ounce of my willpower not to rip his throat out right then” (Boyne, 2024, p. 108), the difference between Freya's internal impulses and her external response is striking. Internally, Freya feels a deep anger toward George, as reflected in the narrative: “it takes every ounce of my willpower not to rip his throat out right then.” However, in terms of behavior, she still greets George calmly and allows the interaction to proceed according to the superficial plan. This response indicates the use of the ego defense mechanism of reaction formation. By displaying an attitude that is completely contrary to her actual feelings, Freya uses reaction formation as a psychological strategy to mask her aggressive intent and protect herself from the unbearable emotional conflict.

d. Displacement

Next, displacement is evident when Freya redirects her negative emotions toward a safer target than the original source of her emotions. In her childhood, Freya is abused by two fourteen-year-old boys. This traumatic event causes deep anger and a sense of vengeance. As she grows older, Freya develops a desire for revenge against fourteen-year-old boys. She acts on this anger, which is an unresolved negative emotion, toward Arthur and Pascoe. She takes it out on the boys she encountered.

One of the clearest examples is when Freya meets George Eliot, a fourteen-year-old boy sitting alone on a park bench. Upon learning George's age, the urge for revenge surfaced. Although George has no connection to the traumatic events Freya experienced, he becomes the target of her unresolved anger.

Datum 27

‘Good evening, Constable,’ he says. ‘I’m a thirty-something woman who picked up an underage boy a few weeks ago and took him back to my apartment and had sex with him. I know that’s against the law, but let’s just forget that for now because he’s in my apartment and refuses to leave. Can you send someone over to throw him out?’ (Boyne, 2024, p. 66)

Freya also redirects her anger towards Arthur and Pascoe to George Eliot, a fourteen-year-old boy. She takes it out on him by raping him in her apartment, just as she did with Rufus. The datum above tells the story of the moment when George recalls the incident of him raped by Freya. It shows that Freya used the displacement defense mechanism at that time, in which she throws her unfinished anger to an object that has the same age as the original target and is safer to overcome her anger and anxiety.

Freya has bad memories of the construction site next to her mother's house. She has the traumatic experience of being buried alive by Arthur and Pascoe. When faces with the father of a patient who works in a field related to construction, Freya develops an antipathy toward him. In datum 28, Freya reflects, “His son’s file tells me that he’s a construction worker, which might go some way to explain my immediate antipathy to him, as it recalls memories of Arthur and Pascoe, and the building site in Cornwall where they buried me alive” (Boyne, 2024, p. 17). Her reaction illustrates an example of displacement, a defense in which the actual emotion is not directed at the object of the trauma, but is redirected to another object that is safer or more available. Freya becomes antipathetic towards him after learning about this. She unconsciously transfers her unresolved anger from the two past characters, Arthur and Pascoe, to another person she had just met, Borje, just because he has a profession that relates to her traumatic past.

On her way home, Freya receives a call from an unknown number, which triggers a sense of unease within her. Additionally, she feels pressured by the reality that, upon returning home, she will have to face Hugh, her bothersome neighbor. In this state, Freya tries to distract herself and happens to notice a football match involving a group of young boys. Intrigued by the scene, Freya decides to watch the match. After the game ended, Freya approaches one of the young players, Rufus.

In their initial conversation, Freya asks Rufus his age and find out that he is fourteen. This information triggers Freya's desire for revenge.

Datum 29

When we made it to the bedroom, he lay beneath me with such a frightened expression on his face that anyone would think I was forcing myself upon him, and when he whispered, 'Please don't hurt me,' I was this close to telling him to gather his things and leave. His body reacted as it should, however, and somehow we got through it. (Boyne, 2024, p. 59)

Datum 29 explains that Freya is taking her revenge on Rufus, an innocent fourteen-year-old boy. Freya traps and rapes Rufus in her apartment to deal with her anger and anxiety. Every time Freya sees or encounters a fourteen-year-old boy, her desire for revenge arises. The reason is the unfinished anger towards Arthur and Pascoe, so she wants to take it out on the fourteen-year-old boys around her. According to Hall (2019), there are two factors that can be said to be displacement, first, people who use objects that resemble to replace the original object, second, people who replace the object because society does not allow it. Freya's attitude is a form of displacement, where she takes out her unfinished anger on Rufus, who is a safer object and has the same age as Arthur and Pascoe. The sentence "such a frightened expression on his face that anyone would think I was forcing myself upon him, and when he whispered, 'Please don't hurt me'" indicates Rufus's state of helplessness during that period. In the situation where Freya attempts to commit sexual assault, Rufus experiences fear. It shows that the action is driven by Freya, which Rufus doesn't agree with. Even though Rufus is terrified, she still continues the action to overcome her anger and anxiety. Not only Rufus and George Eliot, Freya also rapes Aaron when he was fourteen years old to release her anger due to Arthur and Pascoe. This is shown in datum 30 which is Aaron's statement to Freya.

Datum 30

'But then I was just a child. Only fourteen. It didn't take long for me to feel that I'd done something wrong. Something I wasn't ready for. Within a few months, I'd changed completely. I felt I'd lost something I wasn't ready to lose. And I don't mean the obvious. I mean something far deeper. My innocence, I suppose. My childhood.'

He takes a long, deep breath, as if he's been waiting a long time to say this phrase, which, I suppose, he has.
'You raped me, Freya.' (Boyne, 2024, pp. 114-115)

e. Projection

Freya also employs projection by attributing unacceptable feelings or impulses to others. This mechanism helps Freya reduce the fear, guilt, and internal anxiety that she finds difficult to confront directly.

One example of Freya using the projection mechanism occurs when she works at the hospital and meets a fourteen-year-old boy, George Eliot. During their encounter, Freya observes George with suspicion. George's presence triggers discomfort in Freya, who then interprets the boy's behavior in an exaggerated manner. This feeling of suspicion, which actually stems from Freya's past traumatic experiences with boys her age, is projected onto George, even though there is no evidence to support such assumptions.

Datum 31

He nods. He's seen enough television shows to know the ethics that govern the medical profession. I'm aware of his eyes drifting towards my legs. He isn't any more subtle in his ogling than his father was, just less experienced in it. His tongue protrudes from his mouth and I know that, right now, he's not thinking about Harry. He's thinking about sex. But then, to my surprise, he starts crying. (Boyne, 2024, p. 12)

In this excerpt, it explains that Freya pinned sexual intentions and thoughts to George, a boy sitting on a hospital garden bench, by simply seeing George's actions that have not been confirmed to be true thinking about sex, such as the description Freya depicts in George's gaze and tongue position. The phrase "I know" shows Freya's faith, and is also a projection which is aimed to George, who is a fourteen-year-old like Arthur and Pascoe. Freya is disturbed by the boy's presence, then projects the discomfort through negative assumptions to George.

In their interaction, Freya again projects onto another response from George.

Datum 32

He studiously avoids looking at me. Teenage boys never want to look fragile in front of girls or women. When they talk about us with their friends, they can be ruthless and demeaning, speaking of us as little more than bodies to be used or experimented upon for their pleasure, but when they're alone with someone of the opposite sex, their intrinsic terror and total spinelessness assert themselves. They are monsters, every one of them, utterly devoid of decency. (Boyne, 2024, p. 13)

In datum 32, Freya's internal monologue is revealed as she engages in an intimate moment with George Eliot. George is avoiding eye contact, which leads Freya to conclude that teenage boys are insecure around girls. She believes that when they discuss girls with their male friends, they will be cruel and dismissive and also view girls as objects to satisfy their desires. It shows that Freya is projecting her own fears, emotional wounds, and unresolved anger because of Arthur and Pascoe's actions onto the entire group of teenage boys. She blames teenage boys by generalizing and calling them like "monsters... utterly devoid of decency". It is because Freya has experienced trauma which is depicted in datum 1 and datum 2. Freya feels insecure when interacting with young boys, and shifts to placing all the mistakes made by Arthur and Pascoe and the negative emotions onto all teenage boys.

After Freya finishes raping Rufus, she projects her feelings onto him.

Datum 33

'You should probably leave now,' I told him, which was when I realized that he was drying tears from his cheeks. 'Why are you crying?' I asked. 'If anyone should be upset here, it's me.'
'What?' he asked, looking bewildered. 'What do you mean?'
'I mean we both know that you took advantage of me, but I won't go to the police. You'd only end up in a young offender institution, where God only knows what would happen to you, and I don't want that on my conscience.' (Boyne, 2024, pp. 59-60)

In datum 33, Freya performs projections as a way to protect her fear of punishment. Freya commits a sexual crime against a boy named Rufus in her apartment. Freya traps Rufus after watching his football match and pretends not to know the way to Ramleigh Crescent, then takes Rufus to her apartment and rapes him. When Rufus blames Freya's attitude towards him, Freya's fear and anxiety

arise. She projects the act of rape onto Rufus. In the quote, it shows that Freya does not think that she has raped Rufus, but the opposite. She blames Rufus that Rufus raped her. Freya also mentions that Rufus has taken advantage of her so Freya should be the one who feels disappointed. It is shown in the sentence ‘Why are you crying?’ I asked. ‘If anyone should be upset here, it’s me.’ She emphasizes that she is the victim. Freya's projection of blame onto Rufus serves as a defensive mechanism, a strategy employed to protect her ego from guilt and her fear of imprisonment.

Freya's attitude is similar when she faces George Eliot.

Datum 34

‘I mean, it would be, yeah,’ he says, scratching his chin, ‘if we hadn’t already done it. But since we have, it doesn’t seem so bad.’
‘That was a mistake,’ I say. ‘And I decided not to take it any further.’
‘Take what any further?’ he asks, frowning.
‘What you did to me,’ I say.
‘I don’t get it.’
‘Well, you took advantage of me,’ I tell him. (Boyne, 2024, p. 64)

In datum 34, Freya also throws her blame on George Eliot. Freya's mistake is raping George, a fourteen-year-old boy in her apartment. This dialogue occurs when George, as the victim of Freya's rape, comes back to Freya's apartment with the intention of engaging in sexual activity with her again. George enjoys the sex. It makes Freya surprised. Freya's urge not to make love with the same person twice makes her anxious. She is afraid of having sex with George again. So, Freya projects it onto George because she doesn't want to make love with George again. “That was a mistake, I say” shows that Freya is cornered, she denies it and tells George that the sex was a mistake. Freya does not consider herself to have committed rape against George; rather, she asserts that George has committed rape and taken advantage of her ‘Well, you took advantage of me,’ I tell him (Boyne, 2024, p. 64). Despite the evidence presented, she continues to reject the notion that the incident is her fault. Freya's attitude is almost the same as the attitude she showed to Rufus, as previously described in datum 33. But in the end Freya give in to George's desire to make love and they started having sex regularly.

After several sexual encounters with George, which occurs a total of seven times, Freya begins to feel a sense of boredom and disgust towards the situation. This reflects the emotional tension developing within her. Ultimately, as a form of projection of the unacceptable feelings and impulses, Freya takes extreme action by killing George.

Datum 35

‘How do you like it?’ I shout, as if he’s a whisky connoisseur.
‘On the rocks,’ he says, and I wonder does he even know what that means. I pour a healthy measure into the glass, add some ice, then a substantial amount of the oxycodone and morphine I lifted from the hospital’s dispensary earlier, before bringing it out to him. (Boyne, 2024, p. 108)

Datum 35 occurs when Freya is fed up with George. Freya is unable to decline George's desire to have sex because George says he will tell the police if she does not comply. Freya feels threatened and anxious about George's plan. She feels guilty and afraid of the punishment that awaits her for the mistake she had made to George. She is unable to face the fact that she is the perpetrator. Then, Freya projects the possibility of a threat that even if she continues to have sex, George still can report her and ruin her life. She builds the perception that George is dangerous, when in fact she is the one who put George in a vulnerable condition. By imagining George as a threat, she shifts her position from the perpetrator to the victim. She attributes the incident to George. In datum 35, it is revealed that Freya adds a quantity of oxycodone and morphine, which she had obtained from the hospital, to George’s drink in order to kill him. Freya's actions of murder, which initially appeared to be an act of aggression, are no longer feels like an attack and now perceived as a form of self-defense, driven by her desire to calm her ego.

After committing the murder of George, Freya takes a week off. Upon returning from her leave, she meets Aaron. Aaron suddenly states that he had been raped by Freya nine years ago. She once again engages in projection when she is cornered.

Datum 36

‘You raped me, Freya.’

A mixture of fear and horror runs through my body when he uses this word.

'Don't be so melodramatic,' I tell him. 'It's obscene that you would use that word for something in which you were entirely complicit.'
(Boyne, 2024, p. 144)

The dialogue in datum 36 occurs when Freya encounters her victim of revenge, Aaron, who is a twenty-three-year-old medical student and her coworker and intern under her guidance at the hospital. Freya is unaware of the fact that Aaron was one of her rape victims nine years ago, when Aaron was fourteen years old. When Aaron said 'You raped me, Freya', Freya is shocked. "A mixture of fear and horror runs through my body..." shows that subconsciously, Freya knows that the accusation is true. However, instead of accepting this truth, Freya's ego rejects the reality by saying 'Don't be so melodramatic,' I tell him. 'It's obscene that you would use that word for something in which you were entirely complicit.' Freya's statement can be interpreted as a form of deflection, whereby responsibility is transferred to another party. Freya allocates the responsibility to Aaron, seeking to shield her from her own feelings of guilt and anxiety. She also does so to avoid the moral conflict that damages her image as a doctor. She cannot face the fact that she is a sexual abuser, so she accuses Aaron of overreacting. By calling Aaron "melodramatic", Freya unconsciously transfers her own guilt onto Aaron. Freya performs projection to avoid anxiety, guilt and the destruction of her ego.

f. Rationalization

In several situations, rationalization emerges when Freya attempts to provide logical explanations or rational justifications for behaviors or decisions that are actually driven by internal conflict. This mechanism allows her to maintain a stable and socially acceptable self-image.

Datum 37

Next to him stands an overweight man with a heavily stubbled double chin who I assume is his father. When he catches my eye, he holds it for a moment before allowing his gaze to fall to my breasts. As we ascend through the spinal column of the building, he continues to stare, before looking up and studying my face, as if he's deciding whether or not, given the opportunity, he would have sex

with me. When he looks away and yawns, I can only assume that I haven't met his exacting standards. (Boyne, 2024, p. 7)

In datum 37, the narrative describes Freya's use of rationalization while riding an elevator with a father and son, as previously discussed in datum 12. In this situation, she develops a defense mechanism in the form of rationalization, where she constructs logically plausible reasons to explain events or emotions that actually stem from internal conflict or discomfort. In the quoted passage, Freya interprets the man's gaze in the elevator as sexual harassment. When he then looks away and yawns, Freya concludes that this signifies a lack of sexual interest. This is reflected in the line: "When he looks away and yawns, I can only assume that I haven't met his exacting standards" (Boyne, 2024, p. 7). Here, Freya uses rationalization to express her discomfort or anger at being sexualized. Rather than directly stating that she felt harassed or objectified, she frames it as a sarcastic remark about not "measuring up" to the man's standards. This form of defensiveness shifts the focus from a feeling of humiliation to a kind of bitter, ironic critique.

Freya again engages in rationalization when she is about to sexually assault Rufus. This is evident in the following excerpt:

Datum 38

When we made it to the bedroom, he lay beneath me with such a frightened expression on his face that anyone would think I was forcing myself upon him, and when he whispered, 'Please don't hurt me,' I was this close to telling him to gather his things and leave. His body reacted as it should, however, and somehow we got through it. (Boyne, 2024, p. 59)

In datum 38, it illustrates Freya's position on top of Rufus, where she notices that Rufus is visibly frightened. The sentence "His body reacted as it should, however, and somehow we got through it" reflects a form of rationalization, in which Freya seeks physical justification (Rufus's bodily response) as evidence that her actions could be perceived as "normal" or "not wrong." Rape is inherently a wrongful act, yet Freya attempts to justify her problematic behavior through misleading logic as a way to avoid feelings of guilt. This rationalization also serves as a means for Freya to continue her actions.

g. Identification

Identification is the final ego defense mechanism to be discussed in this subsection. In her adult life, Freya also demonstrates the use of identification, namely by adopting the characteristics of others as a way to cope with feelings of powerlessness or to rebuild her damaged self-esteem caused by past traumatic experiences. Freya engages in identification with the aggressor, in which she adopts the behaviors or traits of the person who once hurt her as a way to feel more powerful or dominant.

Freya was sexually abused as a child when she was twelve years old, and as an adult, Freya repeats the violent patterns from her past by abusing fourteen-year-old young men. In the novel, the character Freya is described as committing acts of rape against three teenage boys: Aaron, George Eliot, and Rufus. Freya's acts of sexual violence cannot be separated from the background of her traumatic experiences in the past. Freya replicates the pattern of sexual violence previously perpetrated by Arthur and Pascoe, two characters who raped her when she was young. In that incident, Freya is framed by being taken to a cave, which later become the location of the sexual abuse. This traumatic experience seems to be a model of behavior that Freya later emulates when she herself becomes the perpetrator. Freya tricks her victims by persuading them to come to her apartment. The apartment then becomes the site of the sexual assaults.

Datum 39

We've reached the end of the road now and I turn left, as instructed. I know exactly where Ramleigh Crescent is and have absolutely no reason to visit it, but it's just off the main road that leads back to my own apartment building, which is all that matters. His phone rings and he takes it out of his pocket and looks at the screen. (Boyne, 2024, pp. 37-38)

Datum 39 illustrates the character Freya's manipulative behavior in pretending not to know the way to Ramleigh Crescent and instead following Rufus's directions. However, in her internal narrative, Freya clearly knows the location. This action represents a strategic maneuver that mirrors the *modus operandi* previously used by the characters Arthur and Pascoe, who lured their victim through manipulation before committing acts of sexual abuse.

Instead of confronting her trauma in a healthy manner, Freya instead imitates the power that once harmed her. This act of identification also explains why Freya becomes a predator with aggressive tendencies; she unconsciously adopts the role of the perpetrator who once hurt her. Freya believes that her actions are a form of revenge, intended to prevent others from becoming victims like herself. Thus, Freya's actions are not only acts of sexual violence but also reflect a cycle of abuse, in which a trauma victim may become a perpetrator when their traumatic experiences remain unaddressed.

4.2.4 Freya's Attitude Development

In her childhood, Freya Petrus, who was initially open and expressive, develops a more withdrawn and reserved attitude after the traumatic event. She employs the defense mechanism of repression by pushing the memory of the sexual abuse committed by Arthur and Pascoe out of her conscious awareness. This form of repression is commonly used by victims of sexual abuse to block painful and shameful sexual elements from their conscious awareness in order to reduce psychological anxiety (Ward, 1988). As the result, she never tells anyone about the incident and chooses to carry the trauma alone.

During the holidays, Freya repeatedly engages in sexual encounters with Arthur and Pascoe. Through rationalization, she easily copes with the anxiety surrounding behavior that is morally unacceptable. She convinces herself that the acts are a form of affection or something a "good girl" might do for her friends. This rationalization allows Freya to normalize what is in fact a highly deviant experience.

She again uses rationalization when she confesses her feeling and get rejected by Eli in the end of the holiday. In order to protect her self-esteem from the humiliation and disappointment, she tells Eli that she is never truly interested in old man or in someone who has a past with her mother. Through this, Freya attempts to preserve her self-worth and avoid confronting her true emotions. The accumulation of these events ultimately leaves Freya feeling disgusted and weary of her situation, which contributes to the development of aggressive tendencies. As

an expression of this aggression, she burns down the Teague family's house. This act is once again framed through rationalization, as she justifies it on the grounds of seeking justice and protecting others from becoming victims like herself. This rationalization serves as an internal justification for a socially and legally unacceptable act of violence.

After the incident, Freya returns to her grandmother's house in Norfolk, England, and spends her teenage years there. She then pursues a medical degree specializing in burn treatment and skin grafts. This career choice reflects the defense mechanism of sublimation, where aggressive impulses are channeled into socially valuable activities. It allows Freya to develop a professional attitude.

In her adulthood, Freya becomes a successful, professional and dedicated burn specialist. However, she still demonstrates the use of the defense mechanism of repression, by repressing traumatic memories from her past and refusing to discuss her personal life, including romantic relationships, with her colleagues. It shows that Freya continues to maintain a closed-off and defensive attitude toward aspects of her personal life. Beneath her professional image, Freya still harbors aggressive tendencies. Freya rapes Aaron in her apartment, channeling her unresolved anger. It is the form of displacement. Aaron is the first victim of her sexual violence. Additionally, her past trauma also triggers a fear of confined spaces, such as when she has to take the elevator. Freya once again displays repression by repressing her anxiety, and rationalization by creating justifications for the discomfort she experiences. When in the elevator with a man, she feels sexually objectified and constructs a narrative that she is unattractive to him, which is a form of rationalization to dampen her feelings of insecurity and her hatred toward men.

The next day, Freya meets a teenage boy sitting pensively on a bench in the hospital garden, George. In this interaction, Freya begins to project onto his responses, ascribing sexual intentions to the boy despite there being no explicit evidence. This reflects her resentment towards men formed from traumatic childhood experiences. The use of this mechanism leaves traces of paranoia in the individual, who harbors hostile feelings toward those around them and undergoes a

psychological metamorphosis into a victim of abuse (A. Freud, 2018). Despite harboring this hatred, Freya is still able to maintain her professional image as a doctor by being friendly and communicative towards George in the work environment. However, this professional attitude only exists in the work environment. After the meeting, Freya again showed her aggressive and predatory attitude. Freya made George her second victim of sexual violence. She traps, then takes George to her apartment and rapes him. This action is a form of displacement, which is the venting of negative emotions to a weaker figure as a substitute for the real object.

The next other day, Freya resumes her duties as a doctor with the same professional demeanor. While treating a burn patient named Vidar, Freya learns that the patient's father, Börje, is a construction worker, a profession that symbolically reminds her of her traumatic past experience of being buried alive by Arthur and Pascoe. Freya exhibits various ego defense mechanisms in this situation. Through repression, she mentions the incident of being buried alive without explicitly revealing its emotional impact. Displacement is seen in her antipathy toward Börje, which reflects the release of her trauma onto a male figure from the past. When she states, "men do not frighten me," denial becomes evident. Freya denies her fear, even though her true feeling suggest the opposite. Finally, reaction formation is apparent when she transforms vulnerable feelings into superiority, asserting that men like Börje should be afraid of her. All these mechanisms illustrate the psychological complexity in Freya's development, dominated by the tension between trauma, hatred toward men, and the need to maintain control. The use of multiple defense mechanisms enables individuals to manage psychological stress more effectively (A. Freud, 2018). A similar attitude is observed when Freya meets Hugh Winley, her neighbor. In this brief encounter, she unconsciously uses reaction formation to cover up her morally unacceptable negative emotions. This emotional tension continues to color Freya's social interactions, even as she attempts to maintain her professional identity.

On her way home, Freya again demonstrates the use of the defense mechanism of repression. She represses her discomfort when seeing two young men

and a woman playing, a situation that indirectly reminds her of her childhood and trauma. Her anxiety increases when she receives a call from an unknown number. Her reluctance to face her neighbor, Hugh Winley, indicates emotional exhaustion and recurring feelings of pressure. To alleviate this distress, Freya decides to watch a youth football game, where she meets a boy named Rufus. This encounter marks a key turning point in the development of Freya's aggressive attitude. She manipulates Rufus into coming to her apartment, displaying a repeating predatory pattern. When riding the elevator to the twelfth floor, Freya again uses repression to press her anxiety about enclosed spaces. She tries to calm her emotional distress by redirecting her attention, such as by breathing regularly and smelling Rufus's body odor. Repression is also evident when Freya observes Rufus's face, noting whether he has acne. This is connected to her hatred of men with acne, which reminds her of Arthur and Pascoe, the perpetrators of sexual violence in her past. In the apartment, Freya exhibits her aggressive behavior. She leads Rufus to the bedroom and physically dominates him. When Rufus shows fear, Freya uses rationalization to justify her actions, convincing herself that Rufus's bodily reactions signal consent. This rationalization serves as a reason to continue and as internal justification for her aggressive sexual behavior. Through this act, Rufus becomes the third victim of Freya's sexual violence. Afterward, when Rufus expresses anger and realizes he has been raped, Freya demonstrates the use of projection. She blames Rufus, accusing him of raping her and threatening to report him to the authorities. This projection reflects Freya's inability to face the reality of her own actions and shows how she shifts guilt and responsibility onto others as an ego defense mechanism.

One week after the rape of Rufus, George Eliot visits Freya's apartment again and expresses a desire to have sex with her once more. However, Freya refuses this request. This behavior is consistent with her previous pattern, where she rejects sexual interactions with her victims more than once. When George blames Freya for the rape that occurred earlier, Freya responds by using the defense mechanism of projection. She turns the situation around by blaming George, accusing him of taking advantage of her. Freya's defensive attitude becomes even

more evident when George threatens to report the incident to the police. Cornered and fearful of the potential punishment, Freya finally gives in to George's desires and has sex with him. At this point, Freya uses the defense mechanism of reaction formation, presenting an accommodating and seemingly willing attitude, when in fact, she is attempting to avoid conflict and maintain a sense of security.

However, as time passes and after seven sexual encounters, Freya starts to feel disgusted and repulsed by the situation. Her aggressive attitude resurfaces in a concealed manner. She plans to murder George, using reaction formation to hide her intentions. Freya shows false friendliness and remains calm. When George lets his guard down, Freya adds drugs she obtained from the hospital (oxycodone and morphine) to George's drink, ultimately killing him. This act is a form of projection, where Freya redirects the fear and threat she feels toward George and justifies the murder as a response to the psychological pressure she experiences. After killing George, Freya takes a one-week leave, which represents a temporary effort to calm herself. However, upon returning to the hospital, she is confronted by a new situation: Aaron, her first victim, reveals that Freya raped him nine years ago. Freya responds with denial and projection. She denies the accusation and blames Aaron, claiming that it was Aaron who was responsible for the incident. This defense strategy reflects her inability to face the guilt and maintain her self-image. However, her defensive efforts are not strong enough to prevent legal consequences. When Aaron plans to report the matter to the police, Freya decides to flee and head to the airport. This action reflects both a literal and symbolic escape from responsibility and the confrontation of the consequences of her actions.

In her adulthood, Freya's shift from being a victim to becoming a perpetrator of sexual violence also illustrates the process of identification with the aggressor. Regarding identification, it is a defense that frequently occurs among adolescence and adulthood (Cramer, 1987; Cramer & Porcerelli, 2016). By identifying with the aggressor, an individual transforms themselves from someone who is threatened into someone who poses a threat (A. Freud, 2018, p. 90). She imitates the behavior patterns of Arthur and Pascoe, the two men who raped her when she was twelve years old, in a subconscious attempt to regain control and

power over herself. In this context, Freya’s aggressive actions toward young boys serve as a way to cope with her past sense of helplessness, creating a cycle of abuse that continues to repeat.

In order to offer a clearer illustration of Freya’s attitude development, the preceding discussion is summarized and systematically presented in the diagram below (see Figure 1).

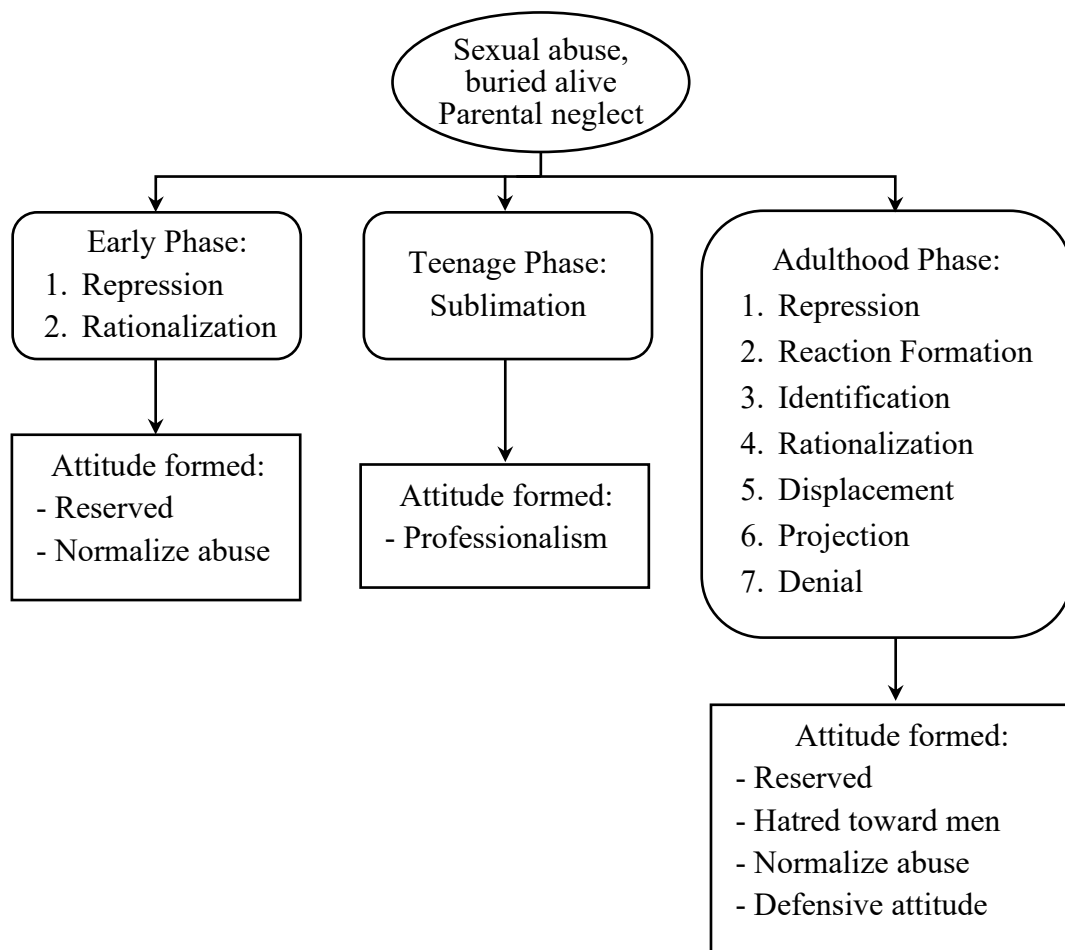


Figure 1. Freya's attitude development.

The figure above presents a diagram illustrating the development of Freya Petrus’s attitude over time. The diagram visualizes the relationship between childhood psychological trauma, ego defense mechanisms, and the resulting attitudes at each developmental phase: early, teenage, and adulthood. It also

illustrates not merely a pattern of behavioral change, but revealing a deeper, tragic sublimation. In her childhood the foundation of this tragic sublimation is laid through a series of devastating experiences, including sexual abuse, being buried alive, and parental neglect. These traumas lodge themselves deep within Freya's unconscious, where they cannot be directly confronted, only displaced or reinterpreted.

Based on Freya's attitude development, among the earliest of these defenses is repression, which serves as the core mechanism and the primary trigger for the formation of more complex ego defense patterns. Through repression, she silences her own suffering by pushing traumatic memories out of conscious awareness. Following repression, Freya adopts rationalization, attempting to provide logical justifications for her traumatic experiences— most notably by reframing abuse as affection and betrayal as misguided care. Rationalization becomes the dominant mechanism during her early developmental phase. These mechanisms—repression and rationalization—contribute to the formation of a reserved attitude and a tendency to normalize the abuse she experienced. Rather than confronting her trauma, she constructs a mental framework that allows her to survive it, though it comes with a tragic cost.

As she enters teenage, the dominant mechanism shifts to adaptive defense mechanism, sublimation, which involves redirecting aggressive impulses into more socially acceptable activities, such as her studies in the medical field. This mechanism not only illustrates a more mature psychological response but also contributes to the development of a professional attitude in her character. During this phase, only one defense mechanism is clearly portrayed. When compared to John Boyne's other works, such as *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*, which similarly explores childhood trauma, it becomes evident that Boyne tends to center his narratives around what he describes as “the most violent time”. This narrative focus is supported by Boyne himself in an interview during the Jaipur Literature Festival (2024), where he stated his intent to highlight periods of extreme violence as a means of shaping the emotional and psychological journeys of his characters. In *Fire*, this narrative tendency results in Freya's teenage phase being portrayed only

briefly, as the most intense violent time is situated in the earlier and adulthood phase of her life. Consequently, only one dominant defense mechanism—sublimation—is emphasized during teenage, reflecting both the structure of the narrative and the author’s characteristic focus on the most violent periods.

Here, sublimation begins its tragic course—not as a transformation toward healing, but as a psychic defense that obscures the damage, allowing it to fester beneath the surface. Sublimation becomes a mask: the precision of her surgical skills hides the chaos within; her profession becomes an outlet for her violent past. Unconsciously, she has become a monster—similar to her past perpetrator. She is not only developing in terms of attitude but is also experiencing a painful transformation that further entraps her in the trauma of her childhood.

However, in adulthood, the most dominant defense mechanisms are reaction formation and projection, which are unhealthy defense mechanisms. Freya shows a tendency to display attitudes or emotions that are opposite to her true feelings (reaction formation), as well as frequently projecting her negative emotions, such as guilt and hatred, onto others. Other defense mechanisms that appear throughout this phase include repression, identification, rationalization, displacement, and denial. Collectively, these mechanisms contribute to the formation of several attitudes, such as a reserved attitude, hatred toward men, and defensive attitude.

Freya predominantly employs maladaptive defense mechanisms, which become increasingly prominent over time. This growing reliance reflects the cumulative impact of unresolved trauma. According to Cramer & Porcerelli (2016), the increasing defense mechanisms serve as psychological strategies to protect individuals from negative emotions associated with traumatic experiences. In Freya’s case, the persistent use of unhealthy defenses illustrates her ongoing struggle to cope with deeply rooted emotional distress, highlighting how trauma can perpetuate and intensify the use of such mechanisms. Overall, the defense mechanisms that dominate Freya’s psychological life are repression, reaction formation, and projection.

CHAPTER V. CONCLUSION

This study reveals that Freya's childhood psychological trauma significantly impacts her motive as character during the narrative on John Boyne's novel *Fire*. Through the application of Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory—particularly the tripartite model of id, ego, and superego, alongside the theory of ego defense mechanisms—this research uncovers how trauma builds not only Freya's emotional responses but also her behavioral patterns across three developmental phases: early, teenage, and adulthood.

The findings show that Freya's id becomes dominant as a result of intense and repeated traumatic experiences such as sexual abuse, being buried alive, and emotional neglect from parental figures. Her ego fails to fully mediate between the primitive desires of the id and the moral standards of the superego, largely because her superego remains underdeveloped due to a lack of nurturing and moral guidance in her early life. As a result, the ego primarily serves as a social mask, especially in her professional life as a burn surgeon, rather than a strong regulator of internal conflict.

Throughout her life, Freya employs defense mechanisms such as repression, rationalization, sublimation, denial, reaction formation, displacement, projection, and identification—as survival strategies to protect herself from overwhelming guilt, fear, and anxiety. These defense mechanisms do not merely function as psychological buffers but actively shape Freya's attitudes toward herself, others, and the world around her.

In her early phase, she uses repression and rationalization to push away and justify her traumatic experiences. These mechanisms lead to the development of a reserved attitude and a tendency to normalize the abuse she experienced. During her teenage phase, she demonstrates sublimation by redirecting her emotional distress into socially acceptable activities, particularly through her decision to pursue a medical career focused on burn treatment. This indicates the emergence of a professional attitude. However, her sublimation into a professional career hides deeper motives, such as a need for control and revenge directed at fourteen-years-

old boys. These motives later manifest in behaviors that deviate from social norms and take on a predatory action. In adulthood, Freya begins to display more complex and unhealthy defense mechanisms to cope with her fear of enclosed spaces, distrust of men, and her underlying desire for control and revenge. It becomes markers of unresolved inner conflict rather than healed trauma.

She continually represses her traumatic memories through repression, displays reaction formation by acting the opposite of her true feelings in interactions with men, and engages in identification by adopting the behavioral patterns of her abusers, specifically by luring victims before committing sexual abuse. Her abusive acts toward young boys represent a form of displacement, wherein emotional impulses rooted in past trauma are redirected toward less threatening targets. Prior to committing these acts, she often seeks physical justification through the bodily responses of her victims, which she interprets as validation that her actions are “normal” or “not wrong”. When her victims resist or confront her about her action, she responds with projection or denial, refusing to take responsibility and transferring guilt onto others. This pattern recurs consistently, reflecting a deeply rooted and unresolved psychological conflict.

Overall, these mechanisms significantly shape her attitudes, including a reserved attitude, hatred toward men, normalization of abuse and a defensive attitude. Although most of the defense mechanisms employed by Freya are maladaptive and become increasingly intense over time, one notable exception is sublimation. Her expertise as a burn and skin graft surgeon stands out as a form of sublimation—becoming the sole accepted attitude and representing a mature and highly adaptive strategy. However, this coping mechanism comes at a tragic cost. It reveals that her achievements and acknowledged expert comes from a normalization of her tragic and traumatic past. Sublimation, in this case, becomes a mask and unconsciously, she transforms into a monster—similar to her past perpetrator. Freya is not only developing in terms of attitude but is also experiencing a painful transformation that further entraps her in the trauma of her childhood.

This research demonstrates that Freud’s psychoanalytic theory reveals such character could possibly overcome the dark past by negotiating between the

individual and the social which justify her acts. The novel unearths the possibility of conflicting the dilemmas, the being and the being-for-others. Social conduct normalizes her expertise, but they do not accept her past though it is the very reason why a person is skillful in burn skin medication. The novel reveals the darker side of sublimation—a tragedy hidden behind skill, masked by professionalism, and driven by unresolved trauma rooted in the past. Furthermore, this study contributes to the ongoing academic discourse about how fiction reflects broader issues such as psychological survival, the failure of social support systems, and the cycle of abuse. The novel *Fire* offers not merely a narrative of victimhood, but also a cautionary tale of what happens when psychological wounds are ignored, minimized, or misdirected.

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