

Psychoanalytic Exploration of Momma's Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and Defense Mechanisms in Never Let Go

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ABSTRACT

This study explores Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) as portrayed in the character of Momma, the main character in *Never Let Go* (2024), and her use of defense mechanisms to cope with her past trauma. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, through Bessel Van Der Kolk's trauma theory and Sigmund Freud's concept of defense mechanisms, this study reveals Momma's extreme measures in isolating her children and enforcing strict rules by avoiding "The Devil" as a result of her grief and fear of loss. Data was collected from scenes, dialogues, and visual components, focusing on Momma's overprotective behavior towards her children. The researcher found several components of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder symptoms, namely intrusive memories, avoidance, emotional numbness, and hyperarousal. At the same time, three characteristics of defense mechanisms are reflected in Momma, namely projection, denial, and displacement. This research shows the relevance of trauma shaping patterns of behavior, especially in a mother, as well as the relationship between psychological trauma, especially the body's response to traumatic experiences, the maternal relationship, and excessive parenting behavior.

Keywords: PTSD, Defense Mechanism, Bessel Van der Kolk, Sigmund Freud.

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INTRODUCTION

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is a psychological condition that arises after experiencing a traumatic event. This condition has attracted attention in academic and other writings, especially in literature studies such as books or movies. PTSD is not only depicted in a storyline, but as a commentary on the human experience of trauma, resilience, and recovery. Literature and film studies often explore the complex side of PTSD sufferers, providing relevant illustrations for audiences to understand the impact on individuals' lives (Scott et al., 2015; Ben-Zion et al., 2019). In recent years, there has been a growing body of literature or film studies that present an understanding of PTSD. For example, narratives that explain the character's process of trauma, the emotional impact, as well as the treatments taken after experiencing the event (Nilaweera et al., 2023). By understanding literature studies, we can understand the mindset of others. So that the resulting work does not highlight personal stories of suffering, but also shows society's response to trauma. Strengthening the understanding that PTSD is a societal challenge, as well as a shared awareness and action that must be taken. (Somma et al., 2021). By understanding the point of view of others, one can feel the same or connect with the work. One instance is seen in the 2024 film *Never Let Go*, which centers on the mother, Momma. She is depicted as going through great psychological anguish all through the film, as seen in her terror as a result of her unhealed inner trauma. The portrayal of this persona shows how deeply and the influence of influencing someone mental and emotional.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) was first introduced as a psychological condition experienced by soldiers after the Vietnam War in 1978. In 1983, The American Psychiatric Association formally published it as a clinically acknowledged psychiatric condition (Shalev et al., 2001). England (2009) mentions that PTSD usually follows a highly traumatic experience. Meanwhile, Mark, G. (2008) emphasizes that PTSD is a serious condition that can change the course of someone's life and is often experienced by those who have had a shocking experience. Based on several definitions, PTSD can be understood as a condition when an individual suddenly experiences emotional devastation due to a horrific experience, which continues to haunt their mind through flashbacks, nightmares, or extreme emotional responses. People with PTSD often stay away from places, events, or anything that could trigger those negative memories, therefore strengthening their sense of isolation and raising their psychological vulnerability (Marlinna & Ernawati, 2024).

Trauma is basically a response to an external experience that imprints on someone's memory and emotions. As cited by Farah (2021), Van der Kolk said that trauma arises when a person does not have internal or external support to deal with threats. Internal factors include a person's inability to adjust to pressure, while external factors can be adverse experiences such as unhealthy parenting, family violence, or criminal acts that damage physically and mentally. One of the characteristics of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder is memory problems (Ruslan, 2024). PTSD often leads sufferers to recall traumatic experiences, as if they are re-experiencing or flashbacks. Accompanied by very real sensations, such as certain sounds, smells, emotions, or visuals, which make the experience feel like it is happening again. Inability to recall some details of the events, a feeling of emotional emptiness, or partial memory loss may occur in sufferers. This indicates a disturbance in the brain system that regulates the storage and recall of traumatic memories. These psychological aspects are depicted in the character of Momma. She is portrayed as having a deep fear of the outside world, she believes in unseen dangers in the form of "The devil" stalking outside her home. Although the threat is not real, her body and mind remain in high alert mode due to unresolved past trauma. As expressed in Humaniora Abdi (2024), referring to Van der Kolk's book *The Body Keeps the Score*, trauma keeps a person trapped in emotional experiences that cannot be expressed in words. When these emotions continue to be suppressed and do not have space to be expressed, anxiety will arise, which can eventually develop into distorted thinking patterns and unhealthy behaviors.

Bessel van der Kolk discusses in *The Body Keeps the Score* how, particularly in the setting of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), psychological trauma may profoundly affect the brain, body, and memory system. Van der Kolk (1994), he notes that PTSD exhibits several qualities. Traumatic memories, or the sudden reappearance of traumatic experiences triggered by specific realistic or symbolic triggers, are usually accompanied by intense emotional and physical responses. Avoidance and emotional numbing aim to get away from reminders of the tragedy and from the inability to experience happy emotions. Consequently, those who are afflicted frequently avoid social situations. Last Hyperarousal entails a strong reaction to stimuli, including sleeplessness, quick awakening, persistent anxiety, and irritability.

In chronic conditions, individuals may misinterpret neutral situations as threats due to unresolved past trauma. Trauma, according to Van der Kolk, leaves a deep mark on a person's nervous system and emotional response patterns. In this context, Momma's behavior is not simply a form of excessive worry, but rather a reflection of the trauma that is pent up and affects her way of thinking and behaving with others. Not only is this distress evident in her PTSD symptoms, but her brain also activates an unconscious self-control mode to reduce emotional distress. This mechanism is key in understanding the reasons behind Momma's actions and decisions throughout the film's storyline, a defense mechanism.

Grohol (2010), states that defense mechanisms are unconscious processes that individuals use to avoid experiencing painful or disturbing thoughts, feelings, or urges. A similar view is expressed by McMahon & McMahon (1986), also mentioned that this mechanism functions as an unconscious way to reduce anxiety and maintain psychological stability. Meanwhile

(Freud, 2014), added that defense mechanisms are carried out by the ego as a form of protection against the emotional stress experienced. From these various views, it can be concluded that defense mechanisms do not actually eliminate threats, but rather change the way individuals perceive them. Each mechanism has a different way of distorting reality and the type of pressure it responds to. These mechanisms usually develop from a person's psychological state and are often used in daily activities. Fenichel (1945), suggests that the main purpose of defense mechanisms is to maintain one's self-esteem. When used proportionally, these mechanisms can help a person adapt and live life better. However, over-reliance on them can inhibit healthy personality functioning. In cases of severe trauma, the use of defense mechanisms can even lead to a misperception of reality, so that individuals adjust their attitudes and behaviors based on an inaccurate understanding.

Seven forms of self defense techniques were originally suggested by Freud then expanded upon by Baumeister et al., (1998). These processes include Reaction formation, which is when a person shows conduct contradictory to their true emotions, generally to preserve self-esteem. Projection happens when people cast forbidden impulses or thoughts onto others. This usually follows a person suppressing a negative perspective of themselves and then starts to be faster at criticizing other people. Because they cannot handle the primary cause of suffering. Displacement, the transfer of emotions like wrath or sadness to smaller items or people. In Freudian psychoanalysis, undoing is the process of eradicating or redeeming upsetting ideas by means of opposing behaviors, as though erasing psychological scars. To be able to remember the incident without being dissolved in emotion, the person isolates the emotion from the traumatic event. Regarded as the most natural form of self defense. Sublimation, turns socially unpleasant urges into constructive pursuits like art or sports. Last Denial is the deliberate or involuntary rejection of unpleasant reality. Denial is Momma's most major form of self-defense. She appears emotionally unable to confront a terrible reality, so her mind automatically denies it to spare herself more mental anguish.

Based on the explanation above, the researcher aims to analyze the film *Never Let Go* to explore the psychological issues experienced by the main character. *Never Let Go* is a film directed by Alexandre Aja and released in 2025. It tells the story of the protagonist, Momma, who displays clear signs of trauma, fear, and denial. She becomes extremely protective of her children, Samuel and Nolan, due to her belief in an invisible evil force that is corrupting humanity. Driven by this fear, she insists that her children remain physically attached to a rope whenever they leave the house, in the hope of keeping them safe from this malevolent entity. Momma also tells Samuel and Nolan terrifying stories about the outside world, convincing them that external forces seek to destroy the love between them and drive them to kill each other. As a result, the children struggle to connect with others and suffer significant mental health consequences. (Muhammad, 2017), explains that trauma can lead to emotional instability, especially when an individual is deeply affected by it. Often, there is a delay between the traumatic event and the emergence of its psychological effects. This aligns with Freud's concept of *Nachträglichkeit* (in books Farocki, 2004), which suggests that the impact of trauma may not surface immediately, but is instead triggered later by certain events.

Several studies have been conducted on psychological struggles in film, including research related to *Never Let Go* (2024). For example, Humaniora Abdi (2024), in "Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) as an Idea for Creating the Film Script '-repeat'," along with Septianingtyas and Seruni (2022) in "Main Character's Traumas in Kiyoshi Matsuda's Re-main Anime: A Psychoanalytic Study," and Rhamadhani and Suherman (2024) in "The Relationship Between Women and War: Experiences and Their Impact on Social Communities," apply a psychoanalytic framework, particularly Van der Kolk's theory of PTSD, to examine the long-term psychological impact of trauma on mental health. Meanwhile, earlier studies such as Marlinna and Ernawati (2024) in "Kya's PTSD and Defense Mechanism as Represented in Delia Owens' *Where The Crawdads Sing*" and Yahya et al. (2025) in "Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and Defense Mechanism in A Good Person Movie Directed by Zach Braff" have explored the broader concepts of PTSD and defense mechanisms by analyzing how the main characters psychologically cope with trauma. These works highlight the influence of psychological

trauma on characters' behaviors, emotional responses, and use of defense mechanisms. However, no previous research has been found that specifically analyzes the film *Never Let Go*. This indicates a research gap, thereby creating a novelty that this study aims to address through the analysis of that film.

METHOD

This research uses a descriptive qualitative method, aiming to answer questions and analyze the phenomenon of PTSD through the film *Never Let Go* (2024). According to Creswell, (2017), this method helps us understand social and cultural issues by analyzing text-based data. Patton (2002), adds that this approach helps us explore the complexity of the real world through detailed stories, providing insight into context and individual experiences. Using the qualitative method of description, content analysis is conducted as the main technique by analyzing the narrative and visual elements in the film to understand how trauma and its impact on Momma's character. Therefore, the author will describe in detail and then analyze the findings with the PTSD theory introduced by Bessel van der Kolk to identify the relationship of trauma with physical and mental conditions, as well as the defense mechanisms used when the trauma is happening proposed by Sigmund Freud contained in the main character of the film. Data was collected using dialog, as well as snippets of scenes from the film. Character portrayals and actions were also scrutinized by the author to support this research.

Craig et al., (2021) mention that films and transcripts are good sources of primary data because they provide accurate information for analysis. First, the information from the film, such as the dialogue, actions, character portrayal, thoughts, and cinematographic details, was grouped into the main character's performances. Second, this analysis is supported by other data from relevant sources. Third, the movie data is analyzed using the Psychoanalytic Van der Kolk trauma theory. Finally, the research will explain the meaning of the main character's scenes in the *Never Let Go* (2024) movie.

FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

The findings and discussion section addresses the research questions and provides a detailed analysis. To achieve this, the researcher has divided the objectives into several key points to ensure a comprehensive examination. The analysis reveals several defense mechanisms employed by the character, including projection, denial, and displacement. These mechanisms significantly influence Momma's life, particularly her interactions and actions throughout the film.

Table 1 *Symptoms* Post Traumatic Stress Disorder Experienced by Momma.

No	PTSD Components	Amount of Data	Frequency
1	Intrusion of Traumatic Memories	3	37.5%
2	Avoidance	1	12.5%
3	Emotional Numbing	2	25%
4	Hyperarousal	2	25%
	Total	8	100%

Table 2 The Defense Mechanism Helps Momma Overcome Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and Survive

No	Defense Mechanism Components	Amount of Data	Frequency
1	Projection	2	40%
2	Denial	1	20%
3	Displacement	2	40%
	Total	5	100%

Source: *Never Let Go* (2024)

Table 1 presents data on various types of PTSD symptoms observed in the character Momma from the film *Never Let Go* (2024). The data illustrate how Momma exhibits

Momma's Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and Defense Mechanism in Never Let Go

symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), with the frequency expressed in both raw numbers and percentages. The most prominent PTSD symptom identified in Momma is intrusive trauma memories, appearing in three scenes, which constitute 37.5% of the total data. Momma frequently experiences this, as she continuously sees the figure of "The Evil," a manifestation of her trauma. Emotional numbing and hyperarousal were each observed twice, accounting for 25% respectively. Meanwhile, avoidance was the least observed, with only one occurrence, representing 12.5% of the total data. In total, eight data points were identified, reflecting four PTSD components, collectively amounting to 100%.

Table 2 presents data related to the defense mechanisms employed by Momma as a means of survival. The most dominant defense mechanisms are projection and displacement, each observed twice (40%). Projection occurs when Momma's fear and aggression surface in response to the perceived presence of "The Evil." Displacement is evident when she redirects her anxiety and emotional tension through excessive control and rigid rules imposed on her children. Denial is observed once, accounting for 20% of the total. This reflects her rejection of the existence of any outsiders beyond their family unit. Overall, the defense mechanisms identified in Momma total 100%, indicating that she unconsciously constructs a perceived reality to survive the impact of her traumatic past emotionally.

Symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder Experienced by Momma

Momma's Intrusive Memories of Traumatic

As Bessel Van Der Kolk explains in his book, *Intrusive Memories of Trauma* are reflected in the character of Momma in the movie *Never Let Go* (2024). It is depicted in a real scene when Momma hugs Nolan and Samuel in the middle of the forest, when both of them are released from the rope tied around their waists. At that moment, Momma looks very scared because there is a figure of "The Devil" who keeps bothering her. The appearance of the figure is triggered by her fear and panic that she still feels, because only Momma feels and sees it.

According to (Schachtel, 1947) Memory is an active part of human personality that plays a role in reconstructing past experiences. The process of remembering does not work like a recorder, but is influenced by a person's mental structure; meaning that the information received can change due to previous experiences, current emotional conditions, and the context of certain situations (Van der Kolk & Van der Hart, 1991). Momma struggled in this situation to separate her internal concerns based on past trauma from the real hazards around her. Van der Kolk & Van der Har (1991), explain that when a person fails to organize traumatic events into a coherent narrative, the memories often resurface in disturbing ways, such as through nightmares, obsessions, or recurring physical symptoms of anxiety.

Table 3 Intrusion of Traumatic Memories in *Never Let Go* (2024)

Duration	Dialogue	Scene	Description
18:50 – 19:00	Momma: "Did it touch you?" Huh?" Samuel: "Uh-huh." Momma: "Did it touch you, Nolan?" Nolan: "I don't think so." Momma: "Hold on the rope." Samuel: "What do you see?" Nolan: "Momma, what is it?" Momma: "Breathe. Just Breathe."		The scene depicts Momma embracing Samuel and Nolan in the middle of the forest, attempting to shield them from the looming threat of 'The Evil.'

In the middle of the woods, Nolan accidentally stepped on Samuel's safety rope, causing the young man to trip and allowing the rope to slip off his body. Nolan understood what was going on and called his mother with a whistle. Upon hearing the whistle, the mother rushed over with a look of terror on her face, signaling great distress as she understood the imminent danger. She immediately embraced her two children, watching them with her breath caught, eyes wide open, and body tense as if they were in the midst of a real threat. While ensuring that her children were safe, she asked them in a worried tone, "Did it touch you?" and urged them to hold on tightly to the harness. She whispered relaxing words like "Breathe in, exhale" in an attempt to soothe them. This response shows a mother's natural need to protect her

Momma's Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and Defense Mechanism in Never Let Go

children as part of the emotional vigilance system that people, especially moms, are born with. A mother naturally wants to protect her children from danger and injury.

In the presence of The Evil, Momma shows indications of the entry of unpleasant memories. For example, when a little girl screams, she is abruptly roused from her slumber (01:25–01:30), suggesting a sensory trigger associated with prior trauma. She also sees her husband lounging outside the home in her hallucinations (31:44–32:57). This picture emphasizes the psychological impact of her prior experiences by arousing strong feelings of guilt, grief, and unresolved internal conflict.

Momma's Avoidance Behavior

Individuals dealing with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) often show a strong inclination to steer clear of specific situations. This avoidance can lead to noticeable changes in their personality, a retreat from social interactions, and issues with sleep, like insomnia, which can throw off their mental well-being and disrupt their daily lives. In the film, Momma consistently avoids going out, particularly in places she views as threatening. This behavior aligns with the research by Gellner et al., (2021), who found that avoidance often emerges as a natural response to perceived social threats, typically fueled by fear or a desire to evade danger. Momma believed that the outside world posed a risk to her family, prompting them to remain indoors and stick to their familiar rituals.

Table 4 Avoidance in Never Let Go (2024)

Duration	Dialogue	Scene	Description
26:09 - 26:55	Momma: "Look around. Look how lucky you are. All your dreams come true. The Evil can't touch you here.."		Momma instructs her two children to perform a prayer ritual in the basement and engage in self-reflection for the mistake they made – removing their restraints while being outside the house

In this scene, the dark lighting and enclosed, constricted room in this scene emphasize a sense of both privacy and safety. Van der Kolk notes that the mother exhibits avoidance behavior. She avoids anything that might bring up painful memories or emotions from her past on purpose. Her hunched posture, the piercing glance directed at Nolan, and her comforting phrases, the Evil One can not touch you here, all indicate that their house is the only place she can be safe. This perspective emphasizes her efforts to repel perceived dangers as well as to establish a secure space for her kids; her avoidance behavior stems from deep anxiety and the lingering effects of past traumas.

Momma's Emotional Numbness

Another characteristic seen in Momma's character is her emotional numbness. According to Litz & Gray (2002), Individuals with PTSD do not completely lose the ability to feel emotions. Instead, they become increasingly accustomed to negative experiences, which can hinder their ability to express positive feelings. As a result, they often experience emotional numbness. This is demonstrated in a scene where Mom brandishes a knife at her two children extreme response that highlights her struggle to handle her emotions and healthily express love.

Table 5 Emotional Numbing in Never Let Go (2024)

Duration	Dialogue	Scene	Description
19:26 – 19 :32	Momma: "Touch the wood. Hands on the cellar. Say it" Momma: "Say it!" Nolan & Samuel: "O blessed house of ancient wood. Shelter to the pure and good."		Momma expresses her anger toward her two children for untying their safety harnesses while being outside. In a moment of intense fear and desperation, she brandishes a knife at them and forces

them to recite a protective incantation

A tense and distressed expression appeared on the mother's face. She stared intently at her two children, holding a knife, and she directed her two children's attention while they repeatedly said the prayer in front of the wooden door. The difficulty in controlling emotions, both good and bad, suggests that the momma has a stress disorder. She cannot control her emotions by showing the love and warmth that a mother should have. Instead, she intimidates and frightens her two children, creating an emotional distance between them. Nolan and Samuel, however, submit to their mother because of the psychological pressure from their mother and their own worry as a result of their current circumstances.

At 21:41-21:49, Momma is seen stunned and hears whispers, she understands the form of “The Devil.” She has a blank expression; she seems not to be scared since she has constantly met the monster. But she gets more worried and defensive around her two children, showing that her trauma and connection with her kids affect her behavior.

Momma's Hyperousal

Another diagnostic component, according to Van der Kolk, is hyperarousal, which becomes a defining characteristic of Momma's behavior throughout the film. The concept of hyperarousal primarily focuses on cognitive processes, where individuals who excessively worry and become overly alert often experience insomnia as a result of their intrusive thoughts (Riemann et al., 2010). This condition may develop into a persistent disorder. Van der Kolk (1994), notes that the continuous activation of the biological stress system, when repeated releases of such stress hormones occur in response to real or imagined threats, causes several physical symptoms, including sleep disturbances and increased sensitivity to touch or sound. As a result, people may become quiet or agitated, thus disrupting their ability to focus and maintain attention.

Table 6 Hyperousal in Never Let Go (2024)

Duration	Dialogue	Scene	Description
48:34 - 48:42	-		Sitting at the edge of the bed in a dim and gloomy room, Momma is seen through the mirror's reflection as unable to sleep, seemingly lost in thought—an indication of the lingering effects of her trauma.

When someone is traumatized, they are in a hyperousal condition. Momma's rushed movements with a tense posture, anxiety, and nervousness with her surroundings is a physical reaction in Momma as it indicates the activation of an implicit memory network that activates when the external stimuli replicate scenes of her previous trauma, as well as internal sensory cues (heart beat, and emotional distress). Such reactions were especially evident when Momma was alone, indicating a very strong fear response driven by unhealed trauma.

Momma hallucinating while searching for food in the forest is another piece of evidence that she is very concerned about the safety of her young. Instead of aiming for her chosen prey, she imagines the body of her child, reflecting her excessive fear and distorted view of reality. (41:47 - 42:00)

The Defense Mechanism Helps Momma Overcome Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and Survive

Momma's Projection Defense Mechanism



Momma employs the defense mechanism of **projection** to cope with her post-traumatic stress. Projection is a psychological strategy often used to reduce internal anxiety by attributing one's unacceptable thoughts or feelings to others. According to Freud, individuals tend to "project" undesirable traits outward so they do not have to acknowledge that those traits exist within themselves (Holmes, 1978). This mechanism is closely related to repression, as it protects the individual from becoming consciously aware of unacceptable aspects of the self. Since individuals can only project traits they are already somewhat aware of, projection as a defense mechanism is based on characteristics previously recognized, even if unconsciously. This psychological process is reflected in Momma's behavior.

Table 7 Projection in *Never Let Go* (2024)

Duration	Dialogue	Scene	Description
22:42-25:10	Momma: "I had to keep telling myself that it wasn't real. But the screams went on for days. So every Morning, I went out to check to see if the Evil had given up, But she was still there. Her skin turned blue and gray. The smell..... I wondered why she was still out there. Samuel: "Why?" Momma: "Because it wanted me to go see that girl. It wanted me to doubt myself. To lure me off the rope. The Evil is clever and patient"		Momma and her two children were having a meal together at the dining table when she began recounting the traumatic experience she had endured to Samuel and Nolan.

In this scene, the family is gathered at the dinner table. The atmosphere appears tense and pressured, reinforcing a sense of anxiety and insecurity, which compels the two children to listen to Momma's story attentively. She recounts a traumatic experience from her past, describing how she heard screams for days and repeatedly tried to convince herself that what she experienced was not real. However, she also expresses a deep fear that the entity she refers to as "The Evil" was attempting to lure her out of the house and manipulate her thoughts, leading her to doubt her perception. Her statement, "Because it wanted me to go see that girl. It wanted me to doubt myself. To lure me off the rope. The Evil is clever and patient." – reveals Momma's projection of her fear and uncertainty onto an external source. This suggests that she refuses to acknowledge these emotions as originating from within herself, instead attributing them to an outside force.

The mother exhibits projection when she expresses frustration over the scarcity of food in the forest and begins planning to cook Koda, the children's pet and companion. Rather than acknowledging her inability to provide adequate sustenance, she blames the climate and environment, thereby avoiding the reality of an external world beyond the myth of the "old world" she has constructed for her children. (53:06 – 55:03)

Momma's Denial of Reality

To cope with her traumatic experience, Momma employs a defense mechanism known as denial. Freud conceptualized denial as a psychological process in which an individual refuses to accept a reality or fact that is too difficult to confront (Boeree, 2006). Denial can disrupt an individual's mental stability by diverting attention away from external reality. This mechanism operates in opposition to memory and consciousness, often rejecting distressing or unwanted information. Such a defense mechanism is evident in Momma's behavior throughout the film.

Table 8 Denial in *Never Let Go* (2024)

Duration	Dialogue	Scene	Description
35:10-35:30	Nolan: "But how do you know we're alone? Maybe our house isn't the only one that's protected." Momma: "Would that make you feel better?" Nolan: "We wouldn't be alone for the rest of our lives." Momma: "We're not alone, Nolan. We have each other. And that's everything. There's nobody else out there, baby. We're the world now"		Nolan started to ask about the possibility of the existence of others out there; however, Momma's firm response led him to believe her.

The term "*romanticization of the family*" refers to the projection of fantasy onto reality, wherein individuals uphold idealized beliefs about the family or a safe world despite contradicting evidence. This psychological mechanism shapes perception, and children raised in such environments are likely to inherit these beliefs as truths. This concept aligns with the scene in which Momma responds firmly to Nolan's question. Her serious facial expression and gentle yet resolute tone reflect a strong desire to convince her child of the truth of her own beliefs and to uphold what she perceives as reality. This is evident in the dialogue, "We're not alone, Nolan. We have each other. And that's everything. There's nobody else out there," despite the actual circumstances potentially differing from her assertion. The scene exemplifies the use of denial as a defense mechanism Momma shields herself from the pain of loneliness by refusing to accept a reality that may trigger anxiety or emotional distress. This analysis adopts denial as the primary coping strategy to deal with trauma, which, paradoxically, intensifies her isolation and reinforces a self-constructed family narrative. Cramer (2006), also highlights how denial transforms reality into a personalized fantasy, thus distorting perception.

Momma's Displacement Defense Mechanism

According to Freud, displacement is a defense mechanism in which unacceptable impulses are redirected toward a different person or object, thereby concealing the source (Feist et al., 2021). Similarly with Boeree (2006), drawing from Freud's work, defines displacement as the act of transferring one's inner desires to a person or object that poses less threat than the original target. In the scene, Momma chooses to release her emotions onto other people or objects whenever she experiences anxiety.

Table 9 Displacement in *Never Let Go* (2024)

Duration	Dialogue	Scene	Description
19:50-20:13	Momma: "Have you lost your mind?" Samuel: "It's all right, Momma. He didn't...." Momma: "Quiet! One more second and it would all been over. For all of us. That rope is your lifeline." Nolan: "I'm sorry.." Momma: "I don't need you to be sorry. I need you to use your head."		Momma is reprimanding Nolan with a high tone and tense expression after Nolan accidentally stepped on Samuel's rope.

In this scene, Momma sternly scolds Nolan with a firm facial expression and a raised voice, stating, "One more second and it would all been over. For all of us. That rope is your lifeline." This emphasizes that even a one-second delay could lead to fatal consequences. The atmosphere is tense and eerie, reinforcing the importance of the rules established by Momma,

which provide her with a sense of safety. This scene illustrates the psychological defense mechanism of displacement, stemming from her past trauma and the belief that the outside world is dangerous and capable of tearing her family apart. Unable to confront the real source of her fear—her traumatic past and the uncontrollable threat of "The Evil"—Momma redirects her anxiety and anger toward Nolan, who accidentally stepped on Samuel's rope. Although the mistake was minor, her reaction is disproportionate. The dialogue "That rope is your lifeline" and "I don't need you to be sorry. I need you to use your head" reflects her deep-seated fear and unresolved trauma, rather than mere frustration over Nolan's error. Furthermore, Momma's behavior toward her child can be identified as overparenting. According to Urone et al. (2024), overparenting is defined as an overly involved parenting style characterized by excessive protection, control, and interference in a child's life.

Another scene that illustrates the use of displacement appears when Momma is asked by her child what the "devil" looks like. Instead of providing a descriptive answer, she responds, "Like my mother. He tries to scare me the way they used to scare her." (21:03–21:18). This response indicates a redirection of unresolved trauma, suggesting that Momma is displacing her own fear and emotional burden onto a symbolic figure, rather than directly addressing the question.

CONCLUSIONS

Using the ideas of Van der Kolk and Sigmund Freud, this research focuses on how unresolved trauma can manifest in Momma's actions with her children, as well as changing behaviors in her daily life due to her fear of the past. In the wider society, when trauma is not addressed, it can affect family relationships and behavior with others. This encourages contributions to health issues and emphasizes awareness and support for individuals who have experienced trauma, especially in domestic and parenting roles.

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