

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

In Stephanie Foo's novel *What My Bones Know*, the main character's journey reveals the profound effects of trauma and anxiety on human behavior, particularly how these experiences contribute to the formation and manifestation of defense mechanisms. Using Freud's theory of trauma and Albertine Minderop's framework for anxiety and defense mechanisms, this study has explored the intricate interplay between psychological struggles and their behavioral expressions in the novel.

The findings of this research highlight that the main character develops various defense mechanisms as a response to unresolved trauma and heightened anxiety. These mechanisms, including projection, displacement, repression, and acting out, become evident during critical moments in the narrative, particularly in the rising action stages. The character's aggressive and defensive responses to situations reflect her subconscious attempts to cope with overwhelming emotions and protect herself from further psychological harm.

This analysis also underscores how the narrative provides a vivid portrayal of the lasting impact of childhood trauma and the complexities of navigating adult life while grappling with anxiety. By presenting these psychological dimensions, Foo not only deepens the reader's understanding of the main character's internal conflicts but also sheds light on broader issues such as mental health and resilience.

Eventually, this study concludes that trauma and anxiety significantly shape the main character's psychological and behavioural development, driving her to adopt various defense mechanisms as a means of survival. The novel serves as a powerful exploration of the human psyche, illustrating the challenges of healing and self-acceptance in the aftermath of traumatic experiences. This research contributes to the understanding of psychological themes in literature and emphasizes the importance of addressing mental health in both personal and societal contexts.

This study has also revealed the nuanced ways in which the main character's defense mechanisms evolve throughout the story. In the beginning, her responses are predominantly reactive, driven by immediate emotional impulses such as anger or fear. However, as the narrative progresses, these mechanisms subtly shift, reflecting her growing awareness of her trauma and its

impact on her life. This evolution underscores the dynamic nature of psychological coping strategies and highlights the character's struggle to balance self-preservation with the desire for personal growth and healing.

Furthermore, the narrative demonstrates the interconnectedness of external circumstances and internal psychological states. The main character's interactions with others often mirror her unresolved inner conflicts, creating a cyclical pattern of tension that both challenges and reinforces her defense mechanisms. These interactions emphasize the role of relationships in shaping one's psychological responses, particularly for individuals who have experienced significant trauma.

This research also underscores the importance of storytelling as a tool for exploring complex psychological themes. Foo's candid and immersive narrative allows readers to empathize with the main character's struggles, fostering a deeper understanding of how trauma and anxiety influence human behaviour. The memoir serves as a reminder of the significance of acknowledging and addressing mental health challenges, both on an individual and societal level.

Fundamentally, this thesis reaffirms that trauma and anxiety are not merely obstacles to overcome but are integral to the character's journey toward self-discovery and resilience. By portraying the multifaceted nature of these experiences, *What My Bones Know* offers valuable insights into the human capacity for survival, adaptation, and healing. This exploration of trauma through the lens of literary and psychological analysis contributes to the broader discourse on mental health and highlights the transformative power of understanding and empathy in addressing complex emotional experiences.

"What My Bones Know" as a symbol of deep sadness and war's lingering impact. A human being is made of blood, flesh, and water—elements that signify life, vitality, and emotion. But in the depths of profound sadness, these essential parts seem to vanish, leaving behind only bones—the barest, most fundamental remnants of existence. Bones, stripped of everything else, become the ultimate testament to suffering, resilience, and survival.

In this interpretation, the title "What My Bones Know" becomes a visual and emotional representation of grief so consuming that it erodes everything but the core of one's being. It captures the extent of pain and loss the writer has endured, where only her bones remain as silent witnesses to her suffering. Her body—the vessel of her experiences—has been reduced to its purest, most unbreakable form, signifying the permanence of her trauma.

Beyond personal sorrow, this phrase also serves as a critique of war, particularly the intergenerational trauma caused by the Vietnam War. The writer, as the daughter of a Vietnamese soldier, carries the invisible yet inescapable scars of a conflict she never directly fought in. Her bones, then, become a metaphor for inherited pain, for the weight of history that has shaped her identity in ways she never chose. This trauma does not exist in isolation; it is layered, compounded by the wounds of the past generations.

Her mother, an adopted child from a Malaysian family with a history of abuse, also carries her own unspoken pain. The abuse she suffered, like the trauma of war, became something she could not escape, and in turn, it shaped the way she parented. The cycle of suffering did not start with the writer—it was passed down, woven into the very fabric of her family's story. The combination of war, displacement, and familial violence left a profound mark, making it nearly impossible to separate personal struggles from the inherited wounds of history.

In a broader cultural sense, bones symbolize both loss and endurance. While flesh decays, bones remain—a lasting reminder of what has been suffered, but also of what has survived. The title suggests that even when everything else is stripped away, the truth, the memory, and the impact of war and generational trauma still live on within her. This is not just a personal reckoning; it is a powerful statement on the way violence—both on the battlefield and within the home—leaves scars that last for generations.

Ultimately, "What My Bones Know" is a haunting, poetic image of sorrow, resilience, and historical reckoning. It is both an elegy for what has been lost and a testimony to the pain that endures. The bones hold knowledge that cannot be erased—a knowledge shaped by war, by grief, by family, and by survival.

This study expands on the psychology of literature approach by examining the notion of trauma, anxiety, and defense mechanisms in the context of literary works. By analyzing these concepts, this study demonstrates how complicated characters, layouts, and story lines are in literary works. It is believed that the findings of this study will not only improve our understanding of the relationship between psychology and literature, but also serve as a foundation for future research in this field. This research will enable for additional research and a better understanding of the psychological factors in literary works by incorporating a psychology-focused strategy that focuses on the theory of internal conflict.