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BAKALÁŘSKÁ PRÁCE

Child development in the novel *Room* by Emma Donoghue

Vývoj dítěte v románu *Pokoj* od Emmy Donoghue

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Odevzdáním této bakalářské práce na téma Vývoj dítěte v románu *Pokoj* od Emmy Donoghue potvrzuji, že jsem ji vypracovala pod vedením vedoucího práce samostatně za použití v práci uvedených pramenů a literatury. Prohlašuji, že jsem při její tvorbě nepoužila nástrojů umělé inteligence jiným způsobem, než je uvedeno ve vyjádření, které je součástí textu práce. Dále potvrzuji, že tato práce nebyla využita k získání jiného nebo stejného titulu.

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ABSTRAKT

Tato práce se zaměřuje na analýzu vývoje dítěte v románu *Pokoj* od Emmy Donoghue, a to z pohledu vývoje jeho vypravěče a hlavní postavy, pětiletého Jacka. Ten strávil své první roky v izolaci se svou matkou, a román popisuje jejich útěk a jeho pozdější přechod a adaptaci na venkovní svět. Práce je zaměřuje na všechny hlavní oblasti Jackova vývoje, včetně jeho kognitivního, emocionálního a sociálního vývoje. Zvláštní důraz je kladen na to, jak izolace od vnějšího světa ovlivnila jeho vývoj a schopnost adaptace po jeho útěku. Tato práce se také zabývá vlivem, který má trauma a izolace na raný vývoj dítěte a to pomocí psychologických teorií, jako je Piagetova teorie kognitivního vývoje, Bowlbyho teorie attachmentu nebo Vygotského teorie sociálního vývoje. Dále, tato práce zahrnuje kritický pohled na rychlost, s jakou Jack dělá pokroky po jejich útěku a při přechodu do venkovního světa. Vystává otázka, zda jeho rychlá adaptace odpovídá vybraným psychologickým teoriím o rekonvalescenci a traumatu. Práce naznačuje, že i když Donoghue zobrazuje Jackův vývoj v souladu s mnoha zmíněnými psychologickými teoriemi, může neúmyslně zlehčovat trvalé důsledky spojené s dlouhodobým vystavením traumatické zkušenosti.

KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA

vývoj dítěte; uvěznění; trauma; *Pokoj*; Emma Donoghue.

ABSTRACT

This thesis aims to examine Emma Donoghue's novel *Room* from the perspective of child development of its narrator and protagonist, a five-year-old Jack. His early years were spent in confinement with his mother and the novel describes their escape and his later transition and adaptation to the outside world. All of Jack's main developmental areas are examined, which includes his cognitive, emotional, and social development. There is a particular emphasis on how his isolation from the outside world affects his development and ability to adapt after his escape. This study also discusses the impact of trauma and confinement on early child development, using psychological theories such as Piaget's cognitive development theory, Bowlby's attachment theory, or Vygotsky's social development theory. Furthermore, the study also includes a critical assessment of the speed with which Jack makes improvements after escaping and transitioning to the outside world. A question is raised about whether or not his surprisingly quick adaptation is in line with selected psychological concepts on recovery and trauma. The thesis suggests that, while Donoghue's portrayal of Jack's development corresponds with many mentioned psychological theories, but it may unintentionally downplay the long-term consequences associated with prolonged trauma exposure.

KEYWORDS

child development; confinement; trauma; *Room*; Emma Donoghue

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Introduction

Emma Donoghue's novel *Room* (2010) is a captivating and genuinely concerning exploration of child development of its main protagonist affected by confinement in early childhood. The novel, written from the point of view of five-year-old Jack, offers a unique perspective on how his environment impacts his cognitive, emotional, and social development. The focus of this thesis is on the ways the novel portrays these impacts, and it deals with one main question: how does confinement in early childhood influence Jack's development? It further attempts to understand and explain the complex relations between trauma, resilience, and child overall development through assessing each part of Jack's growth, focusing on his cognitive, emotional, and social developmental areas alongside with the trauma and challenges he faces after his escape from Room where he grew up only with his mother.

The importance of the novel *Room* goes beyond its literary value since it raises significant issues. Jack's narrative is a thought-provoking view on how children adapt even to traumatising circumstances. Rather than creating parallels to real-life victims of captivity, this thesis will mainly focus on theoretical frameworks and psychological studies that explore the consequences of trauma, social deprivation, and confinement on child development. Lastly, I will try to critically assess how Donoghue's portrayal aligns with the selected child development theories and concepts.

In order to provide theoretical background for the thesis, I provide an overview of child development, with the focus on cognitive, emotional, and social development in early childhood, as well as the importance of play within child development. Additionally, I present a small insight into certain consequences of trauma and confinement on child development in early childhood. I heavily draw on works such as Berzoff et al.'s *Inside Out and Outside In* (2016), Biehler's *Child Development: An Introduction* (1976), Mercer's *Child Development: Concepts & Theories* (2018), and Oakley's *Cognitive Development* (2004), which explore number of aspects of child development and trauma. The novel *Room* is analysed through the perspective of child development. The method I use combines literary analysis with certain psychological concepts. The in-depth study and review of selected academic works, which include psychology theories such as Piaget's theory of

cognitive development, Bowlby's attachment theory, or Vygotsky's social development theory, is used to lay a strong theoretical background for the following practical part.

The practical part then applies these concepts to the novel, particularly its main protagonist and narrator, Jack. It further examines Jack's cognitive development, including challenges with language, differentiation of imagination and reality, as well as his emotional and social development, focusing also on Jack's bond with his mother and the impact it might have on his development. Through this method, I hope to provide a thorough examination of how extreme confinement impacts a child's psychological conditions, as well as if Jack's experience and possible recovery are accurately and realistically portrayed. A close reading of *Room* serves to look at Jack's developmental progress, with a focus on his language development, employment of play, attachment to his mother, and transition to the outside world. This approach, which applies psychological concepts to Jack's experience and his progress, evaluates how the confinement shapes his cognitive and emotional development. It also studies how his post-escape transition and adaptation corresponds with the selected child development theories. By using this method, a provision of deeper comprehension of the novel's portrayal of childhood development together with its complex psychological impacts of confinement is possible.

What inspired me to explore this topic was my own interest in and fascination about the fields of psychology and child development. The fact that Jack is the narrator provides an original perspective on his view of the world. He views many situations from an innocent and unfiltered point of view, which allows readers to see how he constructs his understanding of reality. His limited experience to the outside world makes *Room* a great subject for studying how significantly isolation changes a child's perception, learning, regulation of emotions and other aspects.

1 Background and Context – *Room* by Emma Donoghue

Emma Donoghue is an Irish writer whose tenth novel, *Room*, won several prizes, the Rogers Writers' Trust Fiction Prize, Hughes & Hughes Irish Novel of the Year, Forest of Reading Evergreen Award, or the Commonwealth Prize for Fiction (Canada and Caribbean) in 2011 to name a few. And *Room* was also shortlisted for The Man Booker Prize in 2010, the year it was published. It tells a story of a young woman who was kidnapped and held captive for seven years in a room. She was repeatedly raped by her kidnapper, suffered a miscarriage, and gave birth to a son, Jack. (Ue 101-102) The writer keeps the character of Old Nick, the kidnapper, distant on purpose, focusing mainly of Jack and Ma. Donoghue is equally focusing on life during and after captivity. In fact, much of the novel's tension centres on the difficulties of a young woman striving to raise her young son as normally as possible given the circumstances, both while in captivity and after their escape and reintegration into society (Lorenzi 19).

Room effectively handles trauma by exploring both the public and private spheres. The novel's effect is enhanced by the transformation of Jack and Ma's experiences after they are no longer confined to a very small space. Their escape from the room happens at the exact midpoint of the novel, allowing *Room* to explore the impact of confinement as well as the struggle of reintegration into society. The last section's name, "After", marks the transition from being imprisoned to the hardships of life outside confinement (Lorenzi 19).

According to Donoghue, the novel was more triggered than inspired by the life of Elizabeth Fritzl and the Fritzl case (Crown). Josef Fritzl, who became notorious in 2008 for imprisoning, and sexually and physically abusing his daughter Elizabeth for twenty-four years, repeatedly raped her and fathered seven children, three of whom he imprisoned with her (Middleton 184-185). The author only took the basic notion of a captive woman nurturing her abuser's child with love and care, showcasing an exceptional display of motherhood. The difference can be seen in the fact that the story is deliberately set in North America, the main characters are being held in a garden shed instead of an underground dungeon, and incest element was removed altogether to differentiate it from Elizabeth Fritzl's story (Ue 102). However, Donoghue's work was marketed as a thinly veiled portrayal of the Fritzl case when it was first published in 2010. It was a torn-from-the-tabloids story

that, depending on one's point of view, either examined or exploited the aftermath of an atrocious crime (Brooks).

Emma Donoghue also wrote the script for the 2015 film adaptation of *Room*. Starring Brie Larson as Ma and Jacob Tremblay as Jack, it was directed by Lenny Abrahamson. Larson won the Oscar for Best Actress, and the movie was nominated for four Academy Awards, including Best Picture and Best Adapted Screenplay. It also won the TIFF People's Choice Audience Award. (CBC Books)

2 Theoretical Part

This theoretical part explores the stages of child development, with an emphasis on early childhood, which is essential for comprehending the development of Jack's character in *Room*. The findings offered here heavily rely on Mercer's book *Child Development: Concepts & Theories*, which serves as a basic resource for investigating essential areas of cognitive, emotional, and social development.

It starts with a broad review of child development before diving into early childhood, which is the time frame that is most relevant to Jack's character. The focus is primarily on cognition among the developmental domains because of its strong depiction in *Room*. There are two chapters that follow, and which concentrate on the fundamentals of emotional and social development since these areas are relevant to *Room*. The core concept of trauma is further explored in the final chapter.

This theoretical part lays the theoretical groundwork for the practical part with analysis of how the novel depicts these developmental domains and trauma.

2.1 Overview of Childhood Development

When the term "development" is applied to humans (or offspring of other species), it refers to the range of behavioural, mental, emotional, and physical changes that come with ageing. Child development, then, refers to a person's growth in a predictable direction rather than unpredictable shifts since we have a great deal of information about the developmental patterns of other people. (Mercer 26)

Lerner made important remark that child development falls under the broader umbrella of developmental science, a multidisciplinary study that covers all the changes that occur throughout the course of one's life (qtd. in Berk 4). This approach emphasises how discoveries from psychology, social science, and biology contribute to our understanding of human growth and behaviour (4).

The vast body of knowledge regarding child development is therefore interdisciplinary. Researchers in the fields of psychology, sociology, anthropology, biology,

neuroscience, and public health have collaborated with experts in education, family studies, medicine, public health, and social services, to mention a few, in order to address common issues associated with children. The state of child development today is an indication of the contributions made by these numerous fields (Berk 4).

Information about physical, biological, intellectual, social, emotional, and other forms of behaviour from the prenatal period (or beginning at birth) through adolescence must be considered in order to comprehend development. As children develop, their behaviours show considerable variation at different ages and are influenced by multiple factors, including biology, genetics, past and present experiences, and cultural norms (Biehler 53).

Periods of development

According to the theory of developmental age mentioned by Mercer, it can be most beneficial to evaluate a child in terms of the age group that most closely resembles them, which may or may not be other children of the same chronological age (26). A stage is a developmental period in which children exhibit particular traits that distinguish them from those they have displayed previously or will exhibit in the future. The stage concept implies that stages always take place in the same order, allowing scientists to forecast a child's behaviour as they enter the next stage based on their current stage (34).

Hence, stage theorists construct a belief that everyone develops in the same way. In the area of cognition, for instance, a stage theorist might try to establish shared factors that encourage young children to articulate their world through language and pretend play, to think more logically in middle childhood, and to reason more methodically and abstractly in adolescence (Berk 8).

In general, the period of time covered by the study of child development is approximately 12 years, from the time of conception and prenatal life to the point of sexual maturity. Even though everyone above the age of 12 is still legally regarded as a child, many sources restrict the childhood period to a maximum of 12 years in order to better understand child development. Although there might be cases of people reaching puberty (the start of sexual maturity) before turning 12, most people do not, and childhood is typically thought

of as the time before reproduction is possible (Mercer 25). In contrast to this statement, many other sources present stages up to 18 years old.

According to Berk, 5 stages (or periods) of child development can be identified: (1) *the prenatal period*, which is the time of conception till delivery and what is considered to be the fastest time of change as a single-celled creature transforms into a human newborn with extraordinary ability to adapt to life in the outside world; (2) *infancy and toddlerhood* is the time from birth to 2 years of age and significant changes in the body and brain occur at this time (a wide range of motor, perceptual, and intellectual abilities as well as the earliest language and interpersonal relationships); (3) *early childhood* spans from 2 to 6 years and children's motor abilities improve, their bodies get longer and leaner, they gain greater self-control and independence, a play fosters all elements of psychological growth, and they become aware of morals, and start to think and speak at a startling rate, and form bonds with other children their age; (4) *middle childhood* stretches from 6 to 11 years when children acquire new skills and gain knowledge about the outside world and this phase is also distinguished by better athletic skills, taking part in activities with rules, more logical cognitive processes, possessing the basic skills of reading, writing, arithmetic, and progress in understanding of oneself, ethics, and relationships; (5) *adolescence* is the period from 11 up to 18 and it marks the starting point of transition into adulthood as physical and sexual maturity result from puberty, with that adolescents start to develop their own ideals and aspirations, grow less dependent on their families, and their thoughts become more idealistic and abstract (5-6).

Domains of development

Berk explains that development is frequently split into three basic domains: physical, cognitive, emotional, and social, to facilitate the enormous, multidisciplinary study of human constancy and change (4). Every domain has an impact on and is impacted by the others. For instance, an infant's mental comprehension of their environment (cognitive domain) is influenced by newly developed motor skills, such as reaching or crawling (physical domain) and adults stimulate newborns with games, language, and displays of emotions (social and emotional domain) (Berk 4). This complexity of child development across multiple domains

of development does not allow creation of one concept or theory that could contain all of them at the same time. Instead, theories that addressed each area independently were established (Mercer 34).

A comprehensive foundation for understanding child conduct cannot be found in a single theory. When combined, they may be quite beneficial in gaining understanding of development when various behavioural phases and patterns are examined. For example, one can understand more clearly how feeding, potty training, awareness of sex differences, and the consequence of puberty might affect development by using Freud's model of psychosexual phases. His examination of levels of consciousness could potentially help in understanding the possible origins of a wide range of both normal and atypical behaviour. Erikson's psychosocial stage model may help identify crucial components of parent-child dynamics and personality traits that support healthy and positive growth at various developmental stages. With Piaget's theory of cognitive development, it should be possible to undertake complex evaluations of intellectual, linguistic, and moral development and comprehend the distinctions between the mental operations of younger and older children. The application of stimulus-response theories helps parents and educators to be conscious of the importance of reinforcement and how to positively reward desired behaviour while avoiding unintentionally reinforcing undesirable behaviour. Children learn by identifying with others, and the social-learning hypothesis may help explain how they transition from dependency to independence. And finally, Maslow's humanistic perspective may make one more aware of the potential that each child possesses and emphasise the significance of meeting needs (Biehler 171-172). These theoretical frameworks may help to simplify our knowledge of child development. However, it is important to remember that these are traditional concepts with limitations of their own.

Lastly, the study of child development is realising more and more that children are raised in unique contexts, which are special blends of both personal and environmental factors that can lead to various developmental pathways. The experiences that children in non-Western village societies have in their families and communities are very different from

what children in big Western cities experience. These various environments promote various social skills, cognitive abilities, and self-perceptions (Shweder et al. qtd. in Berk 8).

2.1.1 Cognitive Development (in Early Childhood)

In *Room*, Emma Donoghue offers an unusual perspective on brain development in an extreme environment through the story of young Jack. Jack's knowledge of the world, influenced by his limited environment, illustrates early childhood cognitive development. This practical part of this thesis examines Jack's progress, although brief references are offered here to emphasise key theoretical principles.

Laura Oakley's *Cognitive Development* (2004), published by Routledge, investigates the mental processes involved in thinking, knowing, and comprehending, offers a framework for this topic. Oakley defines cognition as a broad term that covers all mental processes and actions related to thinking and knowing. These consist of the gathering, organising, and processing of information. The study of cognitive development focusses on how these processes grow in children and teens, making them more proficient and successful in their mental processes and worldview. Thinking in children differs from thinking in adults. And cognitive development is a research area of how a child's thinking changes as they grow and develop (Oakley 2). Although broad developmental principles are applicable to all cognitive processes due to the wide range of topics considered as components of cognition, more targeted concepts are required for specific areas of development (Mercer 133).

There have been several theories proposed to explain how children's cognitive development develops. They try to define how children's cognitive development happens, what changes in thinking occur, and what circumstances impact children's cognitive development (Oakley 8).

With an emphasis on ideas relevant to preschool-aged children, this chapter covers Piaget's theory of cognitive development. To give a complete overview of early childhood cognitive development, important domains of cognitive development such as memory, learning, communication and language development, and moral understanding will also be examined.

Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development

Jean Piaget's cognitive development theory, developed in the early 20th century, is an important framework for understanding children's mental progress.

Piaget's cognitive development theory emphasises *accommodation*, *equilibration*, and *assimilation*. *Assimilation* involves incorporating new information into a mental framework, or schema. Schemas are the mental structures that help individuals organize and interpret information based on past experiences. Children form cognitive frameworks to understand the world and incorporate new experiences. *Accommodation* is changing an old structure after a new experience. Children grow and encounter events that do not fit into their already existing schemas. Thus, they must respond with creating new schemas. *Equilibrium* involves assimilation and accommodation to stabilise cognition. Children actively seek to understand the world in new situations. Children learn how the world works, but they are always challenged by new experiences. All of these schemas should fit together to form a logical worldview at equilibrium (Hummel qtd. in Oakley 14).

To expand on Piaget's views on cognitive development, it is necessary to realise the view in children's active participation in their own learning. Berk explains that Piaget believed children's learning was independent of adult rewards. His cognitive-developmental theory states that children actively learn by changing and exploring their environment. According to his hypothesis, children go through four major phases as their brains mature and their experiences grow, each with distinct thinking styles (19). Every stage is a step, and every step indicates a greater degree of growth and cognitive capacity, and it is significant to note that these phases occur in a fixed sequence (Oakley 15).

According to Piaget, cognitive development begins in the *sensorimotor stage*, when the newborn explores the environment via his or her senses and movements. These behavioural patterns develop into the preschooler's symbolic but illogical thinking in the *preoperational stage*. Afterwards, in the *concrete operational stage*, cognition is changed into the more structured, logical thinking of the school-age child. At last, during the *formal operational stage*, the teenager and adult's abstract, systematic thinking system is formed (Berk 19-20).

Oakley describes two sub-stages are contained in the pre-operational stage, which falls within the early childhood period and lasts from two to six years of age, the pre-conceptual and intuitive periods. During the *preconceptual period* (2-4 years), language development accelerates, symbolic and internal representation continues, and imaginative play develops. When representing things, the child starts to use language and symbols. However, *egocentrism* and *animism* are responsible for cognitive limitations. The term *egocentrism* refers to a concept when a child can only see the world from their own point of view and finds it challenging to comprehend any other point of view. (18) Meanwhile, *animism* is the inclination to attach feelings and intentions to non-living things. The *intuitive phase* (4-6 years) is distinguished by the growth of mental order and classification. Nonetheless, since the child is unaware of the ideas and principles underlying the classification, it is intuitive. (19)

Mercer adds that even though their abilities are still restricted, children in the pre-operational period are starting to solve issues both mentally and practically. During this time, children acquire skills like *conservation* – the knowledge that while an object's shape may change, its volume or number never changes. (106)

Other concepts related to preschool and early school age

Besides egocentrism, animism, and conservation, there are other concepts, articulated by Mercer in his work, explaining children's cognitive immaturity that limits children's learning and problem-solving abilities.

Perspectivism, the ability to see things from different perspectives, develops gradually and is first noticeable in simple situations, like most cognitive abilities. Preschoolers' scale errors also indicate shifting perspectives. Children may climb into or sit on miniature cars or chairs as if they were real (121). *Concreteness* is viewing mental events as physical objects. A terrifying dream or story may be as scary as the real thing for preschoolers and older children. This trait relates to preschoolers' confusion about how pretends can change people or things and appearance-reality differentiation (Flavell, Flavell, and Green qtd. in Mercer 121).

Preschoolers typically use *transductive reasoning*, which gradually fades and is replaced by more complex reasoning. If two objects or events share one trait, children use this reasoning to conclude they must share other traits, such as a cause-and-effect link (121).

Concept creation, which started in infancy, continues in early childhood with the acquisition of *classification abilities*. This cognitive step allows preschoolers to group similar objects. They can only classify things by one category or characteristic at first. Two-way classification allows complex rules around age five (121).

Ordering objects in a particular order, such as from smallest to largest or sweetest to least sweet, is called *seriation*. Young children can say "one, two, three," but they can only combine numbers if they know two is always larger than one. Because of this, seriation is essential to math and other quantitative tasks. The skill differs from counting and is usually learnt in early school (121).

Children develop a *theory of mind* in preschool, believing others have knowledge and motives that guide their actions. Between 3 and 4 or 5, they understand false beliefs. This concept suggests that someone with false information may act differently than if they knew the truth. This knowledge helps the child transition from desire psychology, which holds that people act solely on their desires, to belief-desire psychology, which holds that people act on both their desires and their beliefs (122).

Memory

Memory refers to the ability to remember and act on information. Memory displays may include *recall technique*, where the child shows or recounts what they remember. It is difficult and often reveals less memory than other methods. *Recognition* lets the child point to what they have learnt instead of repeating it. *Savings methods* require the subject to relearn lost content that cannot be recalled or recognised. If the material is relearned faster than before, some memory has been retained (Mercer 117).

Memory for visual scenes develops during elementary school and is typically facilitated by scene organisation as McGonigle claims. Route memory is based on spatio-temporal characteristics of moving along the route, not distal cues. The ability to generalise

spatial representations from paths develops between 5 and 10. Event memory develops alongside script memory, which recalls typical events in context (257). For auditorily presented content, it was assumed that the more difficult the words were to rehearse phonologically, the poorer the recall, which is why it was also called as the articulatory loop (252).

Children who have a worse memory of events may be more suggestible when questioned. List recall tests are typically used to assess verbal memory, demonstrating the impact of processing speed on knowledge retention. The factors that most accurately predict what a child will recall from a story are their degree of attention, the depth of encoding, and their familiarity with the material to be recalled (McGonigle 257).

Mercer stresses that memory is not always 'photographic' and that experiences are forgotten unless revisited regularly. It is problematic to suggest that disturbing knowledge can be suppressed or forgotten. It is important to recognise that people sometimes remember things that never happened. When children must testify about crimes they witnessed or experienced, these concerns are crucial (117). Eyewitness testimony requires event memory, and McGonigle believes higher suggestibility contributes to poor recall in child witnesses. This is supported by weaker evidence than previously thought. When asked about a significant event, young children may resist distraction. However, broad leading questions can influence them (250).

Communication development and language

Language and communication are important because cognitive development involves many mental processes. This subchapter examines the development of these abilities, providing key insights for *Room's* practical analysis.

Language development research, a crucial part of cognitive development, involves testing, interviewing, and monitoring young children and older children's academic performance. These methods enable normative studies of language achievement in children of different ages (Mercer 109). Communication is an early cognitive skill in childhood, and it involves sending and receiving information. The sender may not intend to communicate,

and the recipient may not know what they received. Many forms of communication remain nonverbal after language development (127).

When children learn symbols, they can communicate better. A symbol, such as a gesture, picture, written text, audio feature, or touch, represents or alludes to an item or event and can be reacted to similarly. (Mercer 127) Vygotsky believed language was a cultural tool, a symbolic system for communication, and a way to encode and represent the world. He also believed that language was important in education and that cognitive and linguistic development were linked (qtd. in Oakley 38-39).

Hart and Risley conducted a 1995 long-term study. They studied verbal exchanges and found that while all children started talking around the same age, there were differences by age three. Compared to children from working-class homes, children from academic families had a wider vocabulary. Hart and Risley linked this to parental behaviour. They proposed a connection between language development and parental stimulation. Additionally, Caldwell and Bradley found in 1978 that emotionally responsive parenting was linked to higher IQ scores. This includes following factors: supply of suitable play materials, learning and play opportunities, and parental expectations. (Oakley 69)

Mercer states that children understand and learn complex syntactic principles from age two. In early learning, listening is more important than adult correction, but classroom teaching is usually needed in later stages (129). In early childhood, children develop egocentric speech, the second stage in Vygotsky's language development, which emerges between 3 and 7. Children talk to themselves regardless of who is listening. Words guide or explain their actions and motivations. They think speech controls their behaviour (qtd. Oakley 39)

The first simple sentences are usually “wh” questions. Grammatical errors in auxiliary verb placement. The copula, a contracted grammatical structure, aids auxiliary learning. Negation, like auxiliaries, is difficult to learn, and relative clauses (introduced by “who,” “which,” or “that”) interrupt the main clause's meaning. Despite frequent grammatical errors, children can form complex sentences before five (McGonigle 187).

Learning

Mercer points out the idea of learning is central to the study of cognitive development. Learning is the result of an experience that can occur at two different levels: behaviourally, where it can be observed and assessed, or mentally, where only the learner is aware of it (114-115). Verbal learning can happen by hearing a story repeatedly or on purpose in school. It allows a person to recognise and repeat words aloud or in writing. Verbal learning is intentional through practice and rehearsal. Structured instruction and practice help children learn verbally (Mercer 116-117).

When it comes to types of learning, classical conditioning dominates early learning as stated in Mercer. Classical conditioning involves linking events. It involves learning connections and expectations, but not intentional behaviour. Operant conditioning is another behaviours-based learning method. In operant conditioning, a child's action is followed by a reward, which makes them repeat it. A positive reinforcer is something the child wants, like food or attention, while a negative reinforcer is removing something unpleasant or scary. To guide children or address a problem by increasing the behaviour, adults can use positive and negative reinforcers (115). Mercer also claims the idea of punishment is commonly misinterpreted, and it is not the same as negative reinforcement. A punishment is a negative experience used to deter a child's bad behaviour. Depending on culture and family, discipline or guiding children's behaviour may include punishment and reinforcement (115).

Moral development

Morals refer to judgements or guidelines concerning what is considered right and wrong. It does not seem like children are born knowing these laws or what is ethically acceptable or unacceptable. The process by which infants acquire their moral awareness include not only their thoughts on these matters, but also their actions and emotions in moral circumstances (Oakley 79).

Research has examined moral development as part of cognitive development. Moral development is more variable than other cognitive development. Even though some approaches to moral development take a staged approach and there appears to be a

predictable sequence of moral reasoning stages, not all people reach advanced moral development until maturity, let alone before 12 (Mercer 125).

Based on his studies with children and how they responded to moral dilemmas, Piaget observed that children's moral thinking and understanding developed. After studying moral growth, he created a stage model. Piaget linked cognitive changes to moral development. He believed that children's more sophisticated moral thinking was linked to decreased egocentrism and increased operational reasoning. Moral knowledge requires the ability to see things from multiple perspectives (qtd. in Oakley 80-82). For example, toddlers often steal toys. Most adults and older children think stealing is wrong. Egocentric children do not understand rules or other people's perspectives, so they see the world from their own perspective because the toy will make them happy, and they think this is the right choice (Oakley 82). Piaget also stressed peer contact's role in moral development. He believed this is essential to help children understand others' perspectives and learn how to resolve conflicts over things like who gets the item everyone wants (qtd. in Oakley 82).

Children between the ages of 5 and 8 should be in the stage of moral realism. At this point, rules are sacred and unchangeable. Parents or other adults regulate moral behaviour (a practice known as heteronomous morals). Children assess a behaviour solely based on its results; they do not consider the motives behind the act in question. The acceptance of punishment imposed by an authoritative figure is another characteristic of moral realism. Children believe that collective punishment is reasonable. Children perceive rules as real, thus moral realism (Oakley 82-84).

Oakley writes that through contact children learn how to resolve conflicts and have the power to make rules, which means that rules are dynamic and an essential component of moral growth (84). She also mentions two studies: 1999 study, in which Smetana found that parents who understood their child's development and gave reasoning appropriate to that stage supported moral growth. This suggests morality develops with age. And second study from 2002, when Peterson and Siegal examined moral growth and friendship. In this case, peer popularity significantly predicted children's moral knowledge. Children with few friends or social activities rarely score lower on moral comprehension tests. These studies confirm Piaget's claim that peer contact shapes morality (87).

2.1.2 Emotional Development (in Early Childhood)

Emotional and social development are vital parts of a child's overall growth, influencing how they create connections, control emotions, and behave in social contexts. This chapter looks at how children develop emotionally and socially. Those aspects of development contribute to a more complete knowledge of psychological growth, setting the framework for a practical examination of these topics in *Room*.

As Mercer points out, although both biological and experiential factors play a role in development, the emotional development processes are believed to have significant biological origin. The usual pattern infancy follows is the formation of emotions connected to the experience and expression of pleasure, followed by anger and fear. In the toddler stage, social emotions such as pride, shame, and guilt begin to emerge (156). He adds that children's emotional expression and reactivity to the emotions of others continue to grow from about the age of one until they reach preschool. During this time, fear still plays a significant role in children's emotional development. Mercer also mentions that some children develop a severe fear of innocuous items like masks or clown costumes, while others develop a fear of the dark (147). He further states that fear of separation from loved ones and strangers decreases with linguistic and cognitive development. It is natural for preschoolers to experience fear and sadness (147).

During this time, anger and aggressive behaviour become more visible in the form of negativism, a new a tendency to object to or reject typical events that were previously accepted without hesitation. By 18 months, negativity is well established, and although it fluctuates, it persists until about age 5. Immature verbal and cognitive skills, negativity, and anger can lead to tantrums, physical and emotional dysregulation, and loss of control (Mercer 147-148).

To cite another source, Biehler claims that between the ages of two and five, fear of sounds, unexpected things, pain, falling, lack of support, and abrupt movement decreases. There is a rise in fear of imagined beings, the dark, animals, danger, and humiliation. These changes reflect preschoolers' abilities to predict possible injury while learning to overcome physical fears. Explanations, positive experiences, and advice on how to handle the situation may help children overcome their fears. As well as avoiding sudden or unexpected

fear-inducing situations and allowing children to approach potentially fear-provoking challenges at their own pace may assist in managing fears (396).

Mercer mentions an observation made by Graziano et al. (2016) that empathy continues to grow throughout the preschool years, as seen by children's occasional caring reactions to those in pain, as well as their pretend play with nursing or soothing objects. Preschoolers may detect peers who are unsympathetic or unconcerned about the sentiments of others (149).

The recurrent nature of some tendencies shows that parental warmth and democratic upbringing (where the child's point of view is respected, and constraints are explained) may contribute to the development of confident, socially well-adjusted children. Hostile parents produce angry, withdrawn, poorly adjusted children, while protective parents raise dependent children (Biehler 396).

Developed in 1982, Bowlby's *attachment theory* is deemed the most important biologically oriented theory in the research on child development over the previous 50 years (Mercer 141). Though it was still in its early years and far from the driving force it is now, attachment theory was well-known and had inspired a great deal of research in child development. Attachment theory suggests that young children develop positive emotional reactions to familiar carers and negative emotional responses to separation from their carers or the presence of strangers (Mercer 141, Holmes xii). Bowlby establishes that attachment behaviour is regulated by a biologically based behavioural system that developed to provide protection and safety. The attachment connection starts in infancy and influences development, behaviour in other relationships, risk-taking, and mental health throughout life (qtd. in George 3).

George explains in her article that Bowlby reports how infants form distinct bonds with each main carer. During the first three years of life, these associations develop. The infant clearly distinguishes between attachment figures between six and nine months of age. Attachment behaviour and circumstances that trigger the attachment system are similar from the age of one to three. Yet, three-year-olds may display higher separation anxiety and challenges with attachment than infants (5-6). By the age of four, attachment is defined by cognitive-affective models of relationships. Children that use these internal models are able

to predict, evaluate, and plan with their parents rather than just responding to their presence, which results in a change in attachment behaviour and processes. This change represents a significant transformation, the start of an attachment-caregiving partnership. The child has some understanding of a parent's wants, and their own attachment needs are influenced by the established trust in parent availability and responsiveness (Bowlby qtd. in George 6).

Another highly influential scientist in the research of attachment was Mary D. Salter Ainsworth who describes “quality of attachment” or “attachment status” as individual differences in attachment patterns in her book *Patterns of attachment* (1978) (George 6). Attachment status covers the whole spectrum of attachment experiences. Attachment is often classified into four primary patterns: three organised and one disorganised (George 6).

The organised attachment patterns might be further divided into individual types: *secure*, *insecure-avoidant*, and *insecure-ambivalent-resistant*, according to Ainsworth. When upset, children with organised attachments seek comfort from their parents, and being together brings pleasure and connection. *Secure* children communicate their wants clearly and prefer parental attention. The secure child sees the parent as accessible, sympathetic, and attentive, who enjoys and shares in the child's development. Security encourages competence, teamwork, and the child's curiosity. Therefore, the beneficial attachment-caregiving connection is even, mutually rewarding, comfortable, and marked by emotional sharing and co-creation of plans and activities (qtd. in George 7). Ainsworth then proceeded to identify two forms of insecure attachment. *Insecure-avoidant* child often does not protest when their mother leaves and usually does not respond right away when she returns. This form arises from caregiving that fails to respond to the infant's dependency needs, sometimes even rejecting or punishing them. Mothers of avoidantly attached infants are not always neglectful, yet a crucial need of the infant remains unmet. By twelve months, infants manage their anxiety effectively (Berzoff 202). Ainsworth's second type is *insecure-ambivalent-resistant* children, as stated in Berzoff's publication. They are upset when their mothers leave and appear to welcome their return, but they do not quiet down soon and refuse their mother's comforts. For ambivalent children, clinginess and anger take turns. Many of these children have received inconsistent and chaotic care. Although not purposeful, caretakers' responses to infants' needs are sometimes delayed or inadequate in reducing their needs. By age one,

infants learn to expect regular parental response to signs of need, such as crying or clinginess (Berzoff 202).

Disorganised attachment is considered insecure, although it varies greatly from avoidant and ambivalent-resistant patterns. This kind is called disorganised because defensive mechanisms disrupt organised methods for signalling and gaining closeness, leaving the child overwhelmed by attachment discomfort. Disorganised connection is often shown in behaviours such as confusion, fear, or hostility. By the age of five, disorganised children may have developed controlling tactics to organise and influence their parent's behaviour (George 8-9).

2.1.3 Social Development (in Early Childhood)

Biehler in his *Child Development: An Introduction* (1976) claims that human newborns are dependant at birth but become autonomous after two years. After learning to walk and speak, children need to understand they cannot always get what they want, and that they must occasionally accommodate other people, and that only some behaviours are suitable in particular kind of settings (364-365). Children cannot develop or survive without intensive adult care, yet no child can develop without a biological nature. The current chapter examines how encounters with the social environment impact changes in development (Mercer 166).

The process by which children transition from the egocentric, self-centred, and weakly empathic traits of early childhood, when they are not familiar with many social behaviour conventions, to more adult-like traits that support empathy, social interactions, relationships with adults and other children, and adherence to accepted behavioural norms is known as social development. Age and experience have an impact on social development, just like they do on other areas of child development (Mercer 166). Van Ryzen et al. suggest social competence, the capacity to function well in social interactions and relationships, is a desired result of social development. Adaptive social skills like self-control, empathy, communication, and collaboration are all part of social competency, which helps children build positive connections and a high social standing that supports their continuous development (qtd. in Mercer 167). Social interactions both cause and are caused by social

development, Mercer reminds (167). He also notes that children and adults depend on these interactions to socialise, which involves adopting their community's values, beliefs, and morals. Culture, a group's learnt attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours, is crucial to understanding socialisation. While cultural variations may have an impact on all elements of development, social development is the most culturally impacted of all since it is heavily formed by culture (167).

Social learning theory is a non-stage-based approach to social development. Social development events occur in an organised sequence because societal and familial norms are implemented in an orderly manner. According to social learning theory, children gain social skills by seeing and imitating behaviours of adults. It has been proposed that social learning influences violence, prosocial conduct, and gender roles. A sense of confidence and control of the social environment encourages imitation and social learning, and it may be linked with other experiences to promote social development (Mercer 173).

As suggested by Mercer, peer interactions have a significant impact on social development after the ages of four or five, even though parents and society as a whole actively promote socialisation. Plus, socialisation through peer interactions is a reciprocal process, involving changes in both partners (193). He also states that certain social skills are often better learnt from peers than from adults. Adult-child relationships have unequal power and knowledge, making them less ideal for practicing negotiation, compromise, and communication skills. Children with similar power and information need to put in effort to collaborate or play together successfully. Children heavily rely on interactions with peers to learn specific language, games, and social rules that adults may not understand, as well as to practise language or behaviours that adults may disapprove of (193). The moment toddlers engage in social interactions with their peers, they start to mimic their acts and modify their own behaviour in relation to the approval or disapproval they get. However, for some reason, maybe because to the novelty of the situation, a child could be more impacted by a favourable reaction from an unpopular playmate than from a friend (Biehler 366).

Abraham H. Maslow's theory of motivation emphasises that only others can satisfy wants like love, belonging, and esteem, which establish the scene for self-actualization.

Since children are first impacted by people other than parents and siblings, their behaviour is influenced by social group members. They need acceptance and affection, and peer reinforcement shapes their actions. Many of the assumptions about how parents impact socialisation of their child also apply to the ways children influence each other. They could copy models who give them rewards, or they might notice peers acting in ways that are sex-appropriate or in other ways that appear worthy of imitation (qtd. in Biehler 363).

Mercer assesses the number of uncertainties surrounding gender differences in social development, notably in peer interactions. He observed that boys and girls have diverse peer interactions, hence their social development may differ. Therefore, the ways that boys and girls learn to get along with others may be also different. Gender identification, the feeling of self as male or female, influences play and friendship, which challenges or reinforces gender identity (179-180). Cognitive awareness affects sex role learning, according to Lawrence Kohlberg. Four- and five-year-olds are taught that men and women behave differently. When boys and girls realise they are either male or female, they behave according to their sexes. Children acquire sex-role conduct by identifying with and mimicking parents and by watching and imitating others (qtd. in Biehler 365). Mercer further explains how romantic or sexual rehearsal opportunities arise during peer socialisation, and how they help to improve social competence. Apart from some of their peers, children keep their imitations of adult romantic lives mostly a secret since adults find them funny or alarming. These practices may emphasise romantic impulses, such as when 9-year-olds like each other, for which other children may appreciate or tease. Both sexual and romantic rehearsals assist children in learning gender roles, male and female actions, and attitudes. Rehearses and other peer interactions may help them identify their sexuality and preferred partners before puberty (194).

Bullying and victimisation by peers are stressful experiences that can impact social development negatively, even while peer interactions can contribute positively to socialisation (Troop-Gordon et al. qtd. in Mercer 194). In general, children's reactions to stress and their ability to control their emotions around stress both improve as they get older. However, continuous and early experiences of bullying, around age 8, appear to have long-lasting impacts that make it harder for the victims to handle stress later in life (Mercer 194).

2.1.4 The Role of Play in Childhood Development

Play is an essential component of any child's development since it helps with learning, adjusting to new environments, and expressing their emotions. Play is crucial in *Room* because it provides Jack with coping mechanisms to deal with his own situation. This chapter lays the foundation for the practical examination of play's influence on Jack's character and experiences by offering a theoretical overview of the concept, focussing on its psychological and developmental importance.

In the article *The Importance of Play in Promoting Healthy Child Development and Maintaining Strong Parent-Child Bonds* (2007), Ginsburg describes play as vital to growth, supporting children's physical, mental, social, and emotional health while giving parents the perfect chance to interact with their children. Play also fosters physical, mental, and emotional resilience as well as creativity, imagination, and dexterity. It allows children to have contact with the environment from a young age which is essential for optimal brain development (182-183). Play is the primary source of learning for children before they reach school age and it refers to behaviour that happens naturally, which means without any reinforcement from the outside world (Mercer 125).

Dorothy G. Singer et al., in their book *Play = Learning* (2006) examine many ways of how play enhances children's social, emotional and cognitive development. They state that cognitive abilities may be developed by means of *free play* controlled by a child or *educationally orientated play* led by a teacher or parent. Both types of play support children in learning vocabulary, language, concepts, problem-solving, perspective-taking, representational skill sets, memory, and creativity (22). Play promotes social skills that include turn-taking, teamwork, following rules, empathy, self-regulation, self-confidence, impulse control, and motivation, which have impact on cognitive development (22-23).

The main 20th-century cognitive development theorists Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky stressed the importance of play in cognitive development. Piaget believed that children actively learn via assimilation and accommodation. While *accommodation* is adjusting pre-existing knowledge to accept new information, *assimilation* involves integrating new experiences into pre-existing frameworks in order to restore equilibrium. According to Piaget, play is a crucial setting for cognitive development since it offers

chances for these kinds of interactions. Vygotsky focused on the sociocultural foundation of development, particularly the zone of proximal development, where children learn tasks from parents, educators, or peers. Vygotsky also highlighted that *representational play*, such as using a block as a telephone, helps children learn symbolic representation, thus fostering abstract thinking (Singer et al. 23).

There are different types of play, each serving unique purposes in a child's development. Majumdar emphasises both cognitive and sensory benefits of children *sensory play* (11). Sensory play uses objects that excite the senses, which Gascoyne divides into *external senses* (sight, smell, sound, touch, and taste) and *internal senses* (balance, spatial awareness, movement, weight, and temperature) (qtd. in Majumdar 11). Opportunities for sensory exploration are offered by both interior materials and natural settings, which include things like leaves, trees, and snow. Sensory play is essential for early development because it allows children to explore their environment, expand their knowledge of the world, and create meaningful relationships (Majumdar 11).

Early childhood is the peak of *imaginative play*, another type of play, when it progresses from imitation to complex role-based situations (Singer et al. 74). Also called make-believe play, this type of play is thought to help young children practise and strengthen symbolic schemes, fulfil wishes, master fears and anxieties, as well as learn about social roles. After acknowledging these functions, Vygotsky elevated make-believe play to a main influence on development and described it as a unique and vital zone of proximal development in which children experiment with many skills and learn culturally significant qualities (Singer et al. 78).

Singer et al. emphasises *pretend play* as an essential learning environment that supports children's social and emotional development and promotes understanding between children and adults (209). Children can explore and work through their feelings through pretend play, in which actions and items are not taken literally (Singer et al. 209). Its importance to emotional development is acknowledged by both Piaget and Vygotsky, who both point out that pretend play aids in children's evaluation, and interpretation of their emotions (qtd. in Singer et al. 210). On top of that, pretend play is a valuable tool for emotional development and trauma or stress recovery because it provides a safe space to

express unpleasant feelings like rage without the fear of negative consequences (Singer et al. 210).

Parent-child pretend play can help children who experienced stress, such as hostility, sickness, or accidents, understand traumatic experiences, especially young, traumatised children benefit most from play therapy. However, the advantages of pretend play at such times are typically dependent on the help and supervision of a trusted adult (Singer et al. 212). The authors, Singer et al., cite Punamaki, who says that once a child experiences trauma, parents can try to reassure them and help them make sense of what happened by providing them with reassurance, emotional support, and explanations. When parents are unable to cope with the emotional or physical pain of a traumatic event, such as a war or a mother's rape, their children may feel an increased sense of anxiety because of the important role parents play as mediators (212). They add that parents play an important part in their children's emotional healing by offering comfort and explanations to help them make sense of trauma. Hence, calm communication from parents encourages resilience but chaotic replies can exacerbate stress (212-213). Children benefit greatly from mother-child pretend play when it comes to discussing trauma, comprehending what has happened, and finding comfort and hope again. Despite their personal trauma, some mothers demonstrate extraordinary sensitivity while employing pretend play to help their children. However, not all parents rely on pretend play in this manner; others prefer direct questioning or have no techniques for dealing with trauma in young children (Singer 216, 219, 221).

The idea that watching TV and films can substitute for interacting with real people and having fun is quite widespread. However, a large number of early childhood educators and specialists warn against exposing children younger than two to screen time, according to the American Academy of Paediatrics. Children, who lack the cognitive capacity to distinguish between fiction and reality, are especially sensitive to and affected by the messages they see on TV (Singer et al. 169).

Lemish and Rice (1985) found out that children from newborn to 3 years old learn language by labelling items, asking questions, repeating speech, and describing information from watching TV. In order to help their child acquire linguistic skills, parents played the role of mediators. This study demonstrates how parental involvement and guidance during

TV and video viewing might aid in language development (qtd. in Singer et al. 180). In the same way, Linebarger and Walker (2005) discovered that the type of TV shows young children watch affects their language development. For example, they noticed that shows like *Dora the Explorer*, *Blue's Clues*, *Arthur*, or *Clifford* helped children learn new words and use them more effectively, while *Teletubbies* made children learn fewer words and use them improperly. The study indicated that programs that use structured narratives and language-promoting tactics promote good language development (qtd. in Singer et al. 180).

2.2 Effects of Trauma and Captivity on Child Development

People are significantly shaped by trauma, which affects their relationships and opinions. It drives the story in *Room* by emphasising the hardships and resiliency of the main characters – Jack and his mom. This chapter offers a fundamental summary of trauma's nature, setting the stage for understanding of how it is shown in the novel.

As explained by Berzoff, the term *trauma* is frequently misused in common speech as a synonym for stress. A stressor, which can vary in severity from mild to moderate to severe, is usually what causes stress. Trauma is defined as an event or experience involving the imposition of extreme (or traumatic) stresses, such as real or threatened death, significant injury, or sexual violation (484). However, over the years, our comprehension of trauma has undergone significant development, frequently as a result of societal factors that either encourage or resist recognition of the effects trauma has on people, families, and communities (Berzoff 482).

According to the American Psychiatric Association (2013), in order for an individual to be considered to have been exposed to trauma, they must have personally experienced the traumatic event, witnessed it in person, learnt that it happened to a close relative or friend (with the actual or threat of violent or accidental death), or been exposed to the details of the event repeatedly or to an extreme degree, all without the use of media such as television or films (Berzoff 484).

Nancy Webb, a clinical psychologist, states that children often react to trauma in a number of ways, such as developing particular fears, playing out traumatic events repeatedly,

having nightmares, having trouble separating from others, avoiding reminders of the trauma, and becoming afraid of things that are connected to the trauma, like sounds and smells (qtd. in Singer at al. 211).

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a mental disease whose symptoms change at different stages of development. It can happen when a child's strong negative feeling causes long-term stress and psychological change. Although flashback memories of the horrific incident are frequently linked to PTSD in older children and adults, young children who experience psychological trauma are more likely to exhibit withdrawn or irritable behaviour as well as sleep or feeding issues that lack a clear cause (Mercer 186).

The behavioural signs that accompany PTSD are gradually receiving more attention. Some of these symptoms include: (1) *reexperiencing* – reliving the trauma in dreams or flashbacks; (2) *avoidance* – staying away from situations or people that bring up negative emotions; (3) *negative cognitions and mood* – having trouble focussing on things that used to bring joy, decreased interest in things that used to be fun, and trouble remembering specific details about the trauma; and (4) *arousal*, which can manifest as heightened awareness of one's surroundings, hostility, disruptive sleep patterns, and even suicidal thoughts (Berzoff 484-485). Each person has a different response to a devastating event. Some people react to trauma with a short-term traumatic stress response while others' reactions can have long-term detrimental consequences (Berzoff 485).

In 1999, Lenore Terr provided a typology to describe the characteristics of natural and man-made catastrophes to understand trauma reactions. *Type I trauma* describes a single catastrophic incident. This includes natural catastrophes (e.g. earthquakes, floods, hurricanes), acts of violence (e.g. assault, shooting, robbery), seeing someone get hurt or die, serious and life-threatening disease diagnosis, suffering the loss of loved ones, possessions, or a sense of community (qtd. in Berzoff 485). Lenore Terr further explains *Type II trauma* which refers to the ongoing, recurrent maltreatment that children endure as they mature. More precisely, it is experienced by children who have experienced physical, emotional, or sexual abuse on a regular basis. Also, adults who were abused by a partner can also experience *Type II trauma* (qtd. in Berzoff 486).

Berzoff also mentions another commonly made difference between *impersonal trauma* (such as natural disasters) and *relational* or *interpersonal trauma* (such as childhood abuse, domestic violence or sexual harassment), which adds a new form of destruction based on a violation committed by a different human being (489).

Survivors of trauma have often been victimised by someone who has harmed them. Typically, a bystander has been there and has either failed to aid or has stayed distant or uninvolved. There have been cases where bystanders have stepped in to stop the abuse or save the victim. The way a trauma survivor connects with others in this particular setting is shaped by these methods of interacting. This *victim-victimizer-bystander* pattern manifests itself in regular social encounters, and trauma survivors internalise it as a template for their own perspective and relationships with the world (Berzoff 497).

Neglect or abuse may cause severe stress to infants and young children, making it difficult for them to form stable attachments, coherent identities, and fundamental trust, Berzoff stated in his book (496). He also points out that since traumatic experiences disturb normal developmental activities, medical professionals must carefully examine how they may have affected developmental successes. Children who lack supportive connections and therapy are more likely to acquire complicated trauma as adults (496).

Research on trauma shows that not all children who experience severe stress will develop serious mental health problems. In fact, there is proof that children's resilience varies from child to child, with some children developing normally even though they are under a lot of stressful circumstances continually. Therefore, there is no clear correlation between experiencing trauma and then developing a mental health condition (Singer et al. 212).

The idea of emotional abuse implies that even if children are appropriately cared for and not physically mistreated, they may still be victims of abuse if their parents psychologically harm them. Both direct emotional attacks and neglecting to meet the child's emotional needs, such as not showing love, are considered forms of emotional abuse (Mercer 186).

Singer et al. in their book also argues that depending on their mental health, parents respond to their children's extreme stress in various ways. Many mothers can have

unfulfilled mental health needs. They have experienced significant stress and complex trauma, which is repeated traumatic events, often from infancy to adulthood, that continue to affect coping mechanisms, interpersonal relationships, and self-concepts. Mothers' capacity to protect their children from extreme stress might be weakened by ongoing stress and trauma. When a mother witnesses her child experiencing emotional distress, it might trigger her own trauma and result in dissociation and other trauma responses (213).

It is crucial to keep in mind that a large number of trauma survivors have managed to deal with traumatic experiences without going on to develop psychopathology. They are still living active and healthy lives. Other trauma survivors, on the other hand, battle the lasting effects of childhood trauma, war, or natural disasters, which limit their ability to build their relationships and ambitions later in life. Trauma has the potential to handicap people, wreck their lives, and break their preconceptions. However, there are different ways for dealing with traumatic situations that result in a revitalised sense of hope, conviction, and courage in the midst of hardship (Berzoff 513).

3 Practical Part

This thesis's practical section applies the theoretical concepts presented in the previous part of the thesis to analyse and interpret how Emma Donoghue's novel *Room* portrays child development. The primary focus of analysis is the complex development Jack undergoes which includes cognitive development, including language acquisition and mental processes, emotional and social growth, and the role of play. The possible mental impacts of his experiences are addressed in the last subchapter.

3.1 Character Analysis of Jack

As a five-year-old, Jack is at an important stage in his early childhood development, which is why this thesis is focused on his character. He has characteristics typical of a child who is curious, inventive, and full of energy. That is apparent from the very beginning since he asks questions which are beyond his age: "Was I minus numbers?...Up in Heaven. Was I minus one, minus two, minus three—?" (Donoghue 3).

The confinement of his environment, which he considers to be normal as a result of his mother's cautious care, is the only factor that shapes his understanding of the world. Jack has a strong sense of play, as seen by his frequent creation of games, his ability to personalise items, and his imaginative exploration of his environment. Jack and Ma invent games that help the development of his cognitive skills and Jack shows independence when it comes to playing: "I play Keypad, that's I stand on my chair by Door and usually Ma says the numbers but today I have to make them up" (Donoghue 70). He also demonstrates intelligence by asking questions that are considered to be perceptive and by actively participating with his mother in activities that encourage his understanding of the constrained place they are in. Despite the confinement of the room they are in, Jack understands there is "outside", however, he is not able to imagine what exactly it means:

TV snow's white but the real isn't, that's weird.

'Why it doesn't fall on us?'

'Because it's on the outside.'

'In Outer Space? I wish it was inside so I can play with it.' (Donoghue 9)

Although he has had only a limited amount of contact with the outside world, he has a strong connection with his mother and depends on her for both emotional stability and education. Jack and his mother have a bond that is not just really powerful but also beneficial to both of them. His mother establishes a nurturing environment inside the walls of the Room so that she can be both the educator and caretaker for him. This is done in order to ensure that he is both physically and mentally well. The way in which they engage with one another makes it quite obvious that they have a relationship that is based on love, trust, and dependency. In addition to protecting Jack from the awful conditions of their confinement, she cultivates an atmosphere in which Jack can experience a sense of safety and appreciation.

Jack's whole universe is comprised of personified objects that he interacts with as if they were alive for him to interact with. Donoghue demonstrates this by personification and capitalizing the objects since Jack believes there is only one of each: "That naughty Jeep hides in Wardrobe but Remote finds him by magic and makes him zoom back and forward crashing into the slats" (Donoghue 55). This demonstrates how his mother came up with inventive methods to make their little environment appear larger and more fascinating, which in turn influenced his perspective on the world.

3.2 Cognitive Development of Jack

Jack's isolation and interactions with his mother impact his linguistic and cognitive development in Room. Jack's education is tied to the small space of Room, unlike other children who grow up within varied linguistic and social situations. His limited exposure to stimulation from the outside, dependence on his mother as his only conversation partner, and use of television as a teaching method all contribute to his unique cognitive development. The novel offers a fascinating but also haunting example of how isolation impacts language development and cognitive processes, highlighting the range of possibilities and limitations of early cognitive development in an environment without wider social interactions.

3.2.1 Language, Thought Process and Learning in Room

Piaget's theory of cognitive development provides a framework through which we might examine Jack's cognitive development. Jack's growth corresponds to Piaget's preoperational stage¹. First preconceptual phase is distinguished by the development of language, symbolic representation, and egocentric thinking and animism. Jack, in his constrained environment within Room, has significant evidence of egocentrism, assuming that others see the world in the same way he does. A good example is when Jack is confused when Ma explains she drew him while he was asleep. He can't understand how she could be awake and drawing when he wasn't aware of it. His response: "Not--when you're on at the same time I'm off" (Donoghue 5) illustrates Jack's failure to recognise that others may have different experiences or views. Jack also often shows traces of animism when talking about objects through the whole novel: "I wonder if Rug misses us, is she still in the back of the pickup truck in jail?" (Donoghue 241).

Second intuitive phase is characterised by a gain in reasoning ability, yet children at this point continue to depend on perception rather than logic. Jack appears to be mostly in the preconceptual phase due to his frequent usage of animism. However, once Jack is exposed to the outside world, he appears to transition into the intuitive phase. New inputs and experiences outside of the Room help him expand his cognitive abilities. Jack's reasoning skills start to improve as he experiences more complicated things in the real world. He is moving towards a more logical, but still flawed, reasoning of reality and at the same time still relies on perception:

'I don't think this is it,' I whisper to Ma.

'Yeah, it is.'

Our voices sound not like us. 'Has it got shrunk?'

'No, it was always like this.' (Donoghue 399)

¹ See chapter 2.1.1 of the theoretical part – “Cognitive Development (in Early Childhood)”, “Jean Piaget’s Theory of Cognitive Development” subchapter - for more information.

In addition to the concepts in Piaget's stages of cognitive development, there are other concepts to characterise early childhood thinking². One of these is the conservation. Jack exhibits lack of conservation by questioning numerical values of certain coins: "Why is the five more bigger than the ten one if it's five?" (Donoghue 330). Having never seen coins before, he thinks that their numerical worth is determined by their size which is a typical mistake during the preoperational period of childhood. His difficulties with perspectivism expose his egocentric viewpoint. Jack struggles to understand that other people have different experiences, as seen by his misunderstanding between the real world and what he sees on television: "'But Ma.' I laugh. 'He doesn't go in stores. Stores are in TV.'" (Donoghue 29). This inability to see other than his perspective can be seen among children his age, but the extent is an evident consequence of his confinement. This stresses the disturbing and abnormal character of his life, in which his cognitive limitations stem primarily from his confinement rather than as a phase of early development.

Apart from a few limitations, Jack displays early classification skills by categorising things based on similar characteristics. For example, he differs books with and without images as well as who is more likely to read them – him or his mother (Donoghue 20-21). Further, Jack starts to form a theory of mind. A critical moment appears when he is sceptical about his grandmother. At this point, Jack stays with his grandparents after his mother attempts suicide and is afterwards hospitalised for recovery. Dealing with these changes, he starts to question the honesty of adults and wonders whether he should trust his grandmother's reassurances: "Ma isn't dead, Grandma says she wouldn't lie to me. She lied to Dr. Clay about Checkers" (Donoghue 324-325). Here, Jack realises that humans may have false beliefs, which marks a significant cognitive development.

Factors that influence the formation of memories in young children include familiarity, emotional impact, encoding, and paying attention³. Both Jack's confinement and the trauma caused by his escape have an impact on his memory. His experiences illustrate important components of early memory development, including script memory, spatial

² See chapter 2.1.1 of the theoretical part – “Cognitive Development (in Early Childhood)”, “Other Concepts Related to Preschool and Early School Age” subchapter - for more information.

³ See chapter 2.1.1 of the theoretical part – “Cognitive Development (in Early Childhood)”, “Memory” subchapter - for more information.

memory, suggestibility, and the effects of stress on memory. Because of his limited exposure to the outside world, Jack relies heavily on script memory. As Jack's existence in Room follows an exact routine and schedule, his memory operates within a specific context. This makes it incredibly difficult for him to cope with completely new and unexpected circumstances following his escape as can be seen by his rigid adherence to his daily routine even after the escape:

I shake my head. 'Breakfast comes before bath. '

'It doesn't have to, Jack... We don't have to do the same as we used to,' says Ma.

'I like breakfast before bath.' (Donoghue 213)

It appears that Jack uses the Room routine as a coping mechanism to help him deal with the overwhelming novelty of his surroundings. The fact that Jack finds comfort in what others perceive as a terrifying and tragic experience is perplexing and paradoxical, however understandable, given that it was his whole life up until that point and the only place he ever knew.

Jack also struggles with spatial memory and route learning. He fails to imagine settings other than Room since he has never experienced the outside world. Jack has difficulties with identifying spatial links between places which shows the influence of his imprisonment on his spatial memory. His disorientation is clear as he is in the outside world for the first time and tries to explain where the Room is. As he tries to do so, he cannot understand the spatial links between the room he has been locked in for so long and the locations he is seeing, so he stares around in uncertainty. He finds it difficult to tell where Room is because he is not sure how to place it in his thoughts in relation to the strange world that surrounds him (Donoghue 188).

The way he depends on repetition to memorise the escape strategy depicts the cognitive difficulty of memorising new, stressful information: "We practice and practice. Dead, Truck, Wriggle Out, Jump, Run, Somebody, Note, Police, Blowtorch. That's nine things. I don't think I can keep them in my head all at the same time" (Donoghue 164). The last point to consider is that Jack's memory is affected by suggestibility. This is because children who have been through traumatic experiences are especially sensitive to memory

reconstruction. As a result of the emotional intensity of the events, Jack's memory becomes fractured after the traumatic event - escape. Jack has a clear recollection of Room, but the details of his escape are fragmented and hard to put together. And his experiences in Room provide more awareness of the challenges of early memory development, particularly in challenging circumstances.

Jack's linguistic development is influenced by his surroundings and his interactions with his mother. His language skills are advanced for his age. They are significantly influenced by his need to communicate successfully with his mother inside the small space of Room and his isolation from society. Because Room is his whole universe, he gives symbolic meaning to items, allowing him more effective communication: "That naughty Jeep hides in Wardrobe but Remote finds him by magic and ... " (Donoghue 55). To illustrate the behaviours of his toys, Jack uses symbolic language and imaginative play. By doing that and assigning them human-like characteristics, he is able to set up and regulate his environment exactly as it is stated in Vygotsky's theory⁴, which says language and symbols are means by which ideas and interactions may be organised.

His mother's proactive involvement in Jack's language learning and acquisition has a significant impact on Jack's linguistic development, which is crucially affected by his social deprivation. She helps him develop his language skills by exposing him to new vocabulary and explanations that are above his current level of knowledge: "Ma finds hard words to test me from the milk carton like nutritional that means food, and pasteurized that means laser guns zapped away the germs" (Donoghue 41). This intentional learning of new words illustrates Hart and Risley's findings⁵, which show that children who get more linguistic input from their caretakers have larger vocabularies. Even though Jack's mother is confined to the Room and the things within or brought in by their captor, Old Nick, she makes an intentional effort to ensure that Jack's language develops. The above example demonstrates her creative teaching methods. She additionally includes more challenging tasks, which are beyond his level, such as reading utilizing TV news:

⁴ See chapter 2.1.1 of the theoretical part – “Cognitive Development (in Early Childhood)”, “Communication Development and Language” subchapter - for more information.

⁵ See chapter 2.1.1 of the theoretical part – “Cognitive Development (in Early Childhood)”, “Communication Development and Language” subchapter - for more information.

'Parrot.' She mutes it again.

'Ah, with the whole labelling debate coming hard on the heels of health-care reform, and bearing in mind of course the midterms—'

... 'Good again. However, it was labour law, not labelling.' (Donoghue 43)

Despite their imprisonment, she makes the best use of the insufficient resources she has, ensuring that Jack's linguistic development is not compromised. She also uses light-hearted games to help Jack develop his vocabulary. For instance, when Jack brags about his big muscles, she provides synonyms of the word *big*, and he joins her. In that way, he widens his vocabulary from “vast” to “enormous”, and additionally, Jack adds word like “hugeormous,” showing his understanding of words blending (Donoghue 16). By exposing him to new words and encouraging his linguistic imagination, this conversation shows that his mother helps him develop his language skills in a fun way.

One characteristic of language development in young children is egocentric speech, which Jack uses regularly: "I practice my adding and subtracting and sequences and multiplying and dividing and writing down the biggest numbers there are" (Donoghue 97). This type of self-directed speech helps young children process ideas and lead activities. Jack's desire to talk to himself about his activities supports Piaget's theory that small children use language to manage their own behaviour. This helps him to self-regulate his routine in Room, even when his mother is having one of her bad days when she is not capable of functioning properly. He talks to organise his behaviour and habits: "I don't do Scream because of disturbing Ma. I think it's probably OK to skip one day" (Donoghue 77).

Jack, like many children his age, struggles to understand more complex grammatical principles. He struggles with, for instance, building interrogative sentences: "How you did a picture asleep?" (Donoghue 5). This mistake in word order is a normal among children as they learn how to formulate questions. Moreover, Jack's struggle with the specifics of phrase construction and grammar or word choice: "I don't like when Ma does sarcasm" (Donoghue 81). These issues represent early childhood period, in which children are still developing more sophisticated language skills.

Despite his overall strong linguistic abilities, Jack faces challenges when he deals with outside world. His mother was his only conversational partner until his escape, hence he has little to no experience with dealing with other people. His attempt to communicate his understanding of space reveals his difficulty to describe his reality:

'Room's not in a house,' I say again.

'I'm having trouble understanding, Jack. What's it in, then?'

'Nothing. Room's inside.' (Donoghue 188)

Jack's communicative ability, while practiced in the environment of Room with his mother, is inefficient for meaningful conversation with others in the outside world. Jack initially struggles to communicate with doctors and new family members. Rather than a lack of language development, this post-escape challenge appears to be social.

Jack learns mostly via play, which is typical for his age but given his confinement, it is particularly important. Play becomes Jack's main tool for his mental development, handling his emotions, and exploration without access to conventional education or social interactions with peers. Play functions as both an educational tool and a form of self-expression for Jack. Different types of play help him grow emotionally and cognitively⁶. He engages in spontaneous play, such as jumping on the bed or running in circles, to freely explore movement and energy (Donoghue 67). His mother also adds educational play by leading him through planned activities that teach him new things which is shown in paragraphs above.

In addition, Jack demonstrates representational play, which involves the use of things in a symbolic manner. For example, he may imagine a line of eggshells on a thread as a snake (Donoghue 27). He shows signs of sensory play when he explores his physical environment, such as when he squeezes Play-Doh in the doctor's office after his escape to feel different textures. Through pretend play, Jack also adopts other roles, such a royal, building complex narratives (Donoghue 70), and imaginative play helps him develop stories

⁶ See chapter 2.1.4 of the theoretical part – “The Role of Play in Childhood Development” - for more information.

in which items take on personalities as it was shown through his interaction with Jeep. These numerous types of play help Jack learn and develop on many levels.

Aside from play, television is a significant secondary source of learning, nevertheless his mother carefully limits his exposure to it. Jack's time spent watching TV is both useful and fun, which helps him grow in different ways. His favourite show, Dora the Explorer, supports language learning and connection by repeating things and keeping the audience interested: "At 08:30 I press the button on TV and try between the three. I find Dora the Explorer, yippee" (Donoghue 12). Jack passionately engages in the show: "'Yeah.' I shout out, 'Behind the palm tree,' and the blue arrow clicks right behind the palm tree, she says, 'Thank you'" (Donoghue 13). This experience helps him develop problem-solving and turn-taking abilities, even in his restricted environment. In order to increase Jack's understanding of the natural world, his mother also introduces him to animal documentaries. Thus, Jack learns about the world outside of Room through Wildlife Planet: "At TV time she chooses the wildlife planet, there's turtles burying their eggs in sand" (Donoghue 42). Through these TV shows, he is introduced to ideas, things and places he has never seen before. However, since Jack has never experienced many of the things he sees on TV firsthand, he has a hard time telling reality from fiction. More on this matter later.

Jack's decline in egocentric speech and his increasing understanding of other people's viewpoints are directly related to his moral development. Moral growth, according to Piaget⁷, occurs when egocentrism fades and new perspectives are introduced via interactions with peers. Jack's moral development is largely influenced by his bond with his mother and, subsequently, big development occurs through his interactions with people after the escape. In Room, he first shows great deal of egocentric speech, basing choices only on his own experiences and wishes. When his mother tries to explain him that she needed painkillers, so she could not ask for birthday candles too, Jack replies with: "I didn't need any, just you" (Donoghue 39), showing his struggle in recognising that others, including his mother, might have different priorities and demands.

⁷ See chapter 2.1.1 of the theoretical part – “Cognitive Development (in Early Childhood)”, “Moral Development” subchapter - for more information.

Because Jack does not have any ties with his peers in Room, his perception of what is morally acceptable and unacceptable is largely formed by his mother's guidance. After leaving Room, though, he needs to reconsider his sense of morality considering his exposure to other children and grownups. As he learns to see things from different points of view, he realises that morals and rules are not set in stone but depend on the situation. In a key moment that exemplifies this, he dwells on his own sense of right and wrong when he gives only one of his two quarters to a street person. "Now I feel bad I didn't give her the second quarter. Grandma says that's called having a conscience" (Donoghue 358), Jack reacts when his grandmother explains what this person does not have a home, feeling remorse.

Jack's understanding of good and evil gradually expands to larger moral problems, particularly as he begins to wonder if other people can do dreadful things like Old Nick. Previously, Jack did not have to worry about wicked individuals who hurt others since his mother always protected him in Room. This paradox, where he was not aware that he was part of a horrific reality, becomes more apparent to him when he steps into the outside world and starts to understand that his life in Room was not as safe and normal as he thought. As he faces the hard realities of the outside world, he starts to deal with the troubling thought that evil is not just limited to Old Nick. As he gains insight, he realises that there are more forces at play in shaping morality, some of which he struggles to understand. Eventually, he has a more complex and nuanced view of what is right and wrong, which is different from his old and quite black-and-white way of thinking.

3.2.2 Imagination vs. Reality

The limited environment in which Jack grows up influences his view of reality in Room, leading him to assume that there is nothing outside of Room. Donoghue demonstrates how this social deprivation impacted his development and view of the world. What is more, the perspective of Jack as the narrator allows her to truly capture how he constructs his own reality. As Jack encounters new knowledge that contradicts his beliefs, he experiences considerable cognitive changes that are explained by Piaget's processes of assimilation,

accommodation, and equilibration⁸. These mental operations illustrate how Jack's perception of the world expands from a simplistic to a more complex one. In Jack's case, the changes are quite significant and play an important role in his overall development.

Assimilation happens when Jack incorporates new experiences into his prior knowledge. Initially, Jack thinks that just Room is real and considers everything else to be imaginary: "'But Ma,' I laugh. 'He does not go to stores. Stores are on TV'" (Donoghue 29). Jack believes that everything he sees on television is fictional, which reveals his limited cognitive framework that rules out the possibility of reality outside Room.

Accommodation occurs when Jack modifies his old schemas to accommodate new knowledge. This occurs when Ma clarifies that some individuals on television are real. Jack's reaction: "That's the most amazing thing I've ever heard" (Donoghue 73) demonstrates his cognitive dilemma. He is initially unable to combine this new thought with his previous beliefs, indicating the difficulties he has in shifting his schema in order to differentiate between the imaginary and real world.

Jack uses the process of equilibration in an attempt to achieve a balance between assimilation and accommodation with the intention of creating a clear understanding of the world. Eventually, Jack comes to accept the reality of the outside world, and his schema changes. However, this transition is not without problems. He contemplates on his growing realisation: "Outside has everything. Whenever I think of a thing now like skis or fireworks or islands or elevators or yo-yos, I have to remember they're real, they're actually happening in Outside all together" (Donoghue 88). At this point, Jack starts to make sense of his earlier misunderstandings and shifts towards a more complex and balanced understanding of the world.

Adapting to an unfamiliar information and truths is quite exhausting for Jack. He is overwhelmed from trying to process all the new knowledge: "It makes my head tired. And people too, ... they're all really in Outside. I'm not there, though, me and Ma, we're the only ones not there. Are we still real?" (Donoghue 88). Here, Jack's uncertainty is clear. The overpowering intensity of these new encounters causes him to doubt not just his role in the

⁸ See chapter 2.1.1 of the theoretical part – “Cognitive Development (in Early Childhood)”, “Jean Piaget’s Theory of Cognitive Development” subchapter - for more information.

world, but even his own existence. This moment captures Jack's anxiety as he changes his schemas and gradually comes to deal with his new perspective on the world.

Jack maintains a concrete thinking, which means that he understands abstract concepts in terms of actual objects. He has a hard time telling the difference between the real world and imagination, as shown by the way he creates distinct categories in his mind: "Bunnies are TV, but carrots are real, and I like their loudness" (Donoghue 22). Because he has only seen bunnies on television, he considers them significantly different from real items for him such as carrots, which he personally interacted with. Rather than recognising that both carrots and bunnies exist in the real world, he based his classification on personal experience and traits that he came into contact with.

His fear of nightmares, which terrify him as if they were real, is another sign of his difficulty telling reality from fiction. This might also be looked as response on or consequence of his confinement. For kids his age, this fear is normal since in early childhood children struggle with understanding that thoughts and dreams are not real things. However, Jack starts to see the difference between reality and his dream more clearly while he spends more time outside of Room, especially while staying at his grandmother for some time. The fact that he tells himself things like: "Just a bad dream. That's what Ma would say if she was here but she's not" (Donoghue 321), demonstrating that he is learning to think abstractly and using it even when his mom is not around.

Play is an important part of Jack's cognitive development since it also enables him to test out his ideas and learn the difference between fantasy and reality. Besides television, imaginative play, or books, he lacks any other mental reference he could compare the real world to. Hence, he first compares the outside world to Outer Space when his mother describes it to him: "The stores and forests zoom around in Outer Space?" (Donoghue 74). This analogy shows how Jack uses familiar made-up concepts in order to make sense of unusual circumstances that arise. Play acts like a bridge between Jack's little understanding in Room and the more complicated world outside as he progressively learns to tell the difference between the real and the imagined world.

Jack's response to things he knows from television appearing in Room also shows his lack of ability to properly understand the difference between reality and its depiction on

television: "'That's our bottle.' ... 'The bottle where he took the pill, that's the exact one we've got, the killers'" (Donoghue 71). After seeing a medicine bottle on TV that looks exactly like the one in the Room, he still fails to truly comprehend what his mother is saying when she attempts to explain to him that they are two different bottles. The particular situation provides a demonstration of how he struggles with the concept of mass production and the existence of things that are similar or even identical to those found in Room. Even more so, it highlights the difficulty he has in attempting to comprehend the world beyond his immediate environment.

Books also put his reality perception to the test and make him wonder about their characters: I read the line again, it's still confusing. "Who's the he and the I, are they the kids?" (Donoghue 81). His perplexity comes from the fact that he has never known anyone else other than himself and his mother. The more he realises that there is a world outside Room, the more he gets curious about what is real and what is fiction. This is an aspect that applies to everything he has seen on TV, including for example historical events (probably seen in a historical documentary): "Is the Berlin Wall true?" (Donoghue 88), reflecting his effort to make sense of an overwhelming amount of newly received information and trying to draw a clear line between reality and fiction.

Despite everything his mother has told and explain him about the outside world and what he has seen on television, Jack is nevertheless amazed, and understandably overwhelmed, when he steps out into the outside world for the first time during the escape. He finds it challenging to understand his surroundings as the enormity, noise, and the amount of people are unlike anything he has ever known. Even though he is aware, on some level, that there is a world outside Room for a short period of time, his experience of really being in the outside world is different, leaving Jack perplexed and confused. In order to make sense of his new environment while being under pressure of their escape plan, Jack naturally turns to what is familiar, which includes his mother's explanations and what he has seen on television. This is because Jack has no previous experiences in the real world to rely on.

His reliance on television as a guide emphasises how strongly his early circumstances have affected his perspective of the world and still influences the way he handles new situations. Jack continues to comprehend his shifting reality via the use of tangible

connections as he progressively adjusts to life outside Room. When Dr. Clay show him a revolving door, he associates it with what he has seen on television: "'Oh yeah,' I say, 'I know it in TV'" (Donoghue 245). Jack depends on television as a framework to understand new circumstances thus pointing out the role that television plays in establishing his view of reality. This illustrates how deeply his early surroundings shaped Jack's worldview by demonstrating how, even as he adapts to life outside, he still uses well-known frameworks to navigate and comprehend his new reality.

3.3 Emotional and Social Development of Jack

Jack's confinement in his early childhood has an enormous impact on his emotional and social development. Without any contact with peers or a larger social group, he forms a strong bond and relationship with his mother. He relies on her for comfort, sense of safety, and emotional support. His knowledge of emotions and social interactions and rules is limited to their relationship. Jack lacks other examples of behaviour from which he can learn. He also has to cope with an huge variety of new social expectations, relationships, and emotional obstacles when he starts discovering the Outside world. The novel looks at how his early confinement influences his ability to interact with people and adjust to a new, and, for Jack, quite bewildering social setting.

3.3.1 Emotional Resilience, Attachment, and Coping Mechanisms

Jack's emotional development is influenced by his attachment to his mother. Their attachment pattern might be described as the insecure-ambivalent-resistant type studied by Mary Ainsworth.⁹ This attachment develops since Jack has never had the opportunity to interact with anybody apart from his mother, who has been his only caretaker in Room. In this confined setting, she is not only Jack's source of comfort, but also his only source of safety. As a result, the bond between them is very strong and can be seen acting as a coping mechanism that helps both of them to survive in their horrendous situation. Jack is

⁹ See chapter 2.1.2 of the theoretical part – “Emotional Development (in Early Childhood)” – for more information.

completely dependent on his mother due to the fact that he has no other attachment figures, and both the psychological and physical limitations of Room deepen the special nature of their relationship. Throughout the time they spent in Room, Jack associates his mother's presence with security, since she keeps him safe and shapes his world in a way that makes their confinement tolerable.

The character of their attachment becomes more evident after their escape from the Room and venture into the outside world where there is a chance they will not be able to always be close to each other at all times as they are used to. The thought of being apart from his mother causes Jack a great deal of anxiety and distress. For example, when his mother suggests sleeping in a separate bed at the clinic where they are staying after the escape, Jack declines it and insists on physical closeness. That is because he is used to sleeping in one bed with his mother in Room (Donoghue 217). The idea of even short and momentous separation is still unacceptable for Jack after some period of time they spend in the Outside. So, when Ma attempts to find a middle ground by putting a mattress next to her bed, Jack still refuses:

'What if we took the mattress and put it right here beside my bed so we could hold hands even?'

I shake my head.

'Help me figure this out, Jack.'

'Let's stay both in the one but keep our elbows in.' (Donoghue 257)

His refusal shows the strong nature of his attachment to his mother and the protection his mother's presence gives him. In Room, Jack has learnt to associate her proximity with safety and calmness, so being close to her physically seems to be one of his coping mechanisms with the sudden transition into new and foreign environment. This behaviour corresponds with what Mary Ainsworth says about children who have insecure-ambivalent attachment¹⁰, where they are clingy and worried about being separated from their caretakers. Just as Jack continues to sleep in the same bed despite his mother's gentle attempts to establish a little

¹⁰ See chapter 2.1.2 of the theoretical part – “Emotional Development (in Early Childhood)” – for more information.

space, Ainsworth's study implies that children with insecure-ambivalent attachment might resist independence even when their carer supports it.

Their tied relationship remains same in the outside world. His mother never stops watching out for him and keeps him close. "You keep talking about separation anxiety,' Ma tells Dr. Clay, 'but me and Jack are not going to be separated'" (Donoghue 260). In this case, her protective instincts match Jack's reliance on her. Although she acknowledges Jack's attachment needs, her comment also shows that she finds it difficult to re-evaluate their relationship outside of Room at first. Their relationship, which was once critical to their life and survival, needs to change in order to fit in with the rest of society, and both of them have to figure out how to do that.

After their escape, he gets very anxious when he is away from Ma and clings to her physically and emotionally as was established previously: "Ma's taking my hands off her. I knot them around her tighter so she can't. 'Jack!' 'Stay.' I put my legs around her too" (Donoghue 287). The situation reflects how badly Jack wants to remain close to his mother. Since he lacks knowledge about the outside world, he relies on her even more simply because he has issues comprehending new information about the world around him and handling social situations on his own. However, his experiences and encounters outside of Room eventually lead him to other connections, such as relationship with his grandmother and uncle, which helps him create a more secure attachment. This is clear when Jack chooses to spend time at the museum with his relatives without his mother:

'So do you still want to see those dinosaurs?'

'Without Ma?'

Dr. Clay nods. 'But you'll be with your uncle and aunt all the time, you'll be perfectly safe. Or would you rather leave it till another day?'

Yeah but no because another day the dinosaurs might be gone. 'Today, please.'

(Donoghue 300)

To spend time only with his aunt, uncle and his cousin is an important breakthrough for Jack. It shows that he is ready to connect with people other than his mother and start trusting other

people. This change aligns with attachment theory's idea that constant, pleasant encounters with new attachment figures can build strong connections. It seems Jack is starting to feel safe without his mother around, given that he is able to be apart from her, even if it is only for a short time. Jack is still very attached to his mother, but he learns to trust other family members which indicates a slow transition towards a secure attachment. It needs to be noted that this transition is not an immediate or linear process. Jack's progress is interrupted by moments of regression and hesitation: "Then Paul slides the van shut with a loud clunk. I jump, I want Ma, I think I might be going to cry, but I don't" (Donoghue 301). This additionally shows that Jack is aware of his ability to regulate his emotions as he struggles with wanting his mother and suppressing the urge to cry. Although Jack is not completely independent by the end of the novel, he slowly begins to feel more comfortable around more people, which shows that he is becoming more resilient and adaptable. Jack's transition to a more secure attachment seems plausible given his young age and the natural resilience of children but the speed of his progress appears to be rushed. The novel hardly spans over few weeks therefore his fast adaptation seems hurried considering the experiences Jack went through. His quick improvement can be pleasing for the reader however it may also downplay the long-term impacts of his trauma.

Jack's emotional reactions are considerably affected by his fear. In Room, Old Nick acts as embodiment of his greatest fears. Jack is very aware of danger he represents as he knows that his mother wants to keep Old Nick away from him. His coping technique, which is counting while Old Nick is with his mother, raping her at night, demonstrates his need to maintain some sense of control during these moments. Even though he does not know what is happening, he understands that his mother is in terrifying situation: "I always have to count till he makes that gaspy sound and stops. I don't know what would happen if I didn't count, because I always do." (Donoghue 46). This repetitive behaviour of counting bed creaks becomes Jack's means of securing control over a situation in which he has no power. With its rhythmic repetition, it can function as a form of self-soothing, similar to how younger children deal with stress through a certain routine.

After transitioning into the outside world, Jack's fears change and he develops new fears as well. The new world exposes him to a number of unknown stimuli that overwhelm

his senses. In Room, he lived in an organised and enclosed space with just a few stimuli. But the real world is noisy, chaotic, and hard to predict for his brain. This enormous change makes Jack afraid of many common things, such as open spaces, rain, people, or loud noises. It is truly hard for him to adjust to new setting that is so different from Room. His dependence on his mother remains to be an important source of comfort. He relies on her in a way that goes beyond a normal mother-child relationship, which is absolutely understandable given the situation.

In the beginning, Jack's fears in Room were concrete, they revolved around tangible dangers, such as Old Nick. That being said, his fears get more complex and abstract when he steps in the outside world because they are connected to things he does not fully comprehend yet, like freedom, social norms, and being separated from his mother. This development, which involves moving from being afraid of concrete dangers to dealing with more abstract fears, is typical phase of the emotional development of a child.¹¹ This transition typically happens in early to middle childhood, between the ages of 5 and 7, as children's cognitive abilities improve. Jack, who is five, seems to be going through this transformation almost immediately, which feels hurried knowing how limited his exposure to the outside world is. Thus, the fast pace with which he begins dealing with complex fears and concepts may be perceived as unrealistic.

Jack has occasionally issues with regulating his emotions, resulting in tantrums and angry outbursts. Not only does his developmental stage, early childhood, contribute to his emotional dysregulation, but the harsh conditions of his childhood also play a significant role. For example, Jack's outburst, when he shouts at his mother because he wants to know where she hid his birthday surprise, show his struggle with frustration (Donoghue 27). The tantrum escalates when he rejects a cake by calling it "stinky" just because there is only one candle: "'I don't want this cake.' I hate it when Ma waits all quiet. 'Stinky cake.' 'Calm down, Jack.' 'You should have asked for candles for Sunday treat'" (Donoghue 28). This demonstrates his problems regulating frustration in Room. Outside of Room, emotional outbursts are expected of a child that young as Jack since he faces a massive number of new

¹¹ See chapter 2.1.2 of the theoretical part – “Emotional Development (in Early Childhood)” – for more information.

experiences, stimuli and encounters. The intensity of the new events and the fact that he has been apart from Ma for the longest period in his life overwhelm him. At its worst, this distress leads to a tantrum directed at his grandmother:

'I'm going back to the Clinic,' I shout at her, 'and you can't stop me because you're a, you're a stranger.'

'Jack,' she says, 'put that stinky rug back where it was.'

'You're the stinky,' I roar. (Donoghue 370)

This outburst was preceded by his day with grandma that appears to be full of excitement initially since he gets to try out new things, such as riding an escalator. But then he signs autographs, not knowing he should not do that. When his grandma finds him, she gets nervous and upset and rips up his autographs and drags him away, throwing away a ball she was going to buy for Jack. The abrupt transition from enjoyment to distress leaves Jack perplexed and agitated. While they are in a car, grandma warns him about strangers wanting to take or hurt him which unlocks new and scary idea that there are more people in the world like Old Nick. This news, along with losing the ball and having a lot of intense emotions that day, causes the major breakdown when they get home. Jack's tantrums are normal for his age, but they are more intense due to his undergoing trauma and lack of experience. An average five-year-old feels frustration, but Jack must deal with overwhelming number of new stimuli and challenges. Nevertheless, the novel seems to resolve his emotional dysregulation too quickly. It could be argued that the consequence of this treatment of Jack's emotional outbursts might be an oversimplification of his trauma.

3.3.2 Socialization Challenges Post-escape

Jack's experience in Room and his later transition to the outside world impacts his social development. Early years of confinement denied Jack the experiences of social norms, interactions with different people, and adaptive skills. This experience made him socially inexperienced and disoriented in the new environment. Some of the challenges he has to deal with are relationships, conventions of society, and how to communicate with different

people. Because of this, going from living in isolation to socialising with different people becomes a very challenging process. His early years were terrible and traumatising, which not only slowed down his social development but also made it more difficult for him to create genuine connections to people later.

In Room, Jack interacts only with his mother, which results in a relationship that is strong and intimate. Hence, he bases his entire concept of relationships on this one connection he knows. There is no surprise that he has little foundation for thinking about wider social ties. Because he does not interact with anybody else, he develops misunderstandings about relationships, even among his own family: "I shake my head. 'You're the mother.' 'But I had one of my own I called Mom,' she says" (Donoghue 103). Here, Jack is struggling to understand the mere existence of a grandma, which highlights how significantly his complete isolation has formed his understanding of reality. His narrow perspective hinders his ability to imagine relationships that go beyond the one he has with his mother. This shows how severe the social deprivation he experiences in Room is. Furthermore, Jack's connections with inanimate objects in Room, such as his attachment to Dora the Explorer on the TV, or the furniture in Room, might signal an attempt at compensating for the lack of social interaction. His personification of items like "Rug" and "Wardrobe" and he considering them as friends suggests a need to establish further connections apart from the one with his mother. This connection with inanimate objects he forms in Room makes it harder for him to enter real-life social situations, where relationships need to be based on mutual understanding and support, which is something he did not have to think about in Room.

After escaping Room, Jack displays anxiety and seems to be distant as it is very difficult for him to engage with various individuals. Right upon his escape, he is disoriented and finds it almost impossible to answer question of a police officer, who is one of the people he meets:

'What's that?' She bends nearer, I curl up with my head in my arms. 'It's OK, no one's going to hurt you. Tell me your name a little louder?

It's easier to say if I don't look at him. 'Jack.'

'Jackie?'

'Jack.' (Donoghue 179)

...

'This officer will stay right here with you--'

A face I never saw before pushes in.

'No!' (Donoghue 191)

The fact that Jack is hesitant to do things like answer simple questions or start a conversation shows that he lacks basic social skills when it comes to strangers. His withdrawal shows a fear of strangers¹², which children typically outgrow with increasing exposure to new individuals. However, Jack's anxiety becomes more intense because he has never been exposed to these types of situations before. His unease also results from the traumatic experience and disorientation connected with his escape and seeing the Outside for the first time.

His aversion to physical touch is further indication of his trauma and mistrust towards strangers. The only physical contact in Room he had was restricted to his mother and any other possible touch, such as from Old Nick, was connected with danger and anxiety. Even when examined by a doctor, Jack shows signs of uneasiness and discomfort: " I don't want Dr. Kendrick to touch me, but I don't mind standing on the machine that shows my heavy" (Donoghue 208). Although most kids might experience nervousness during doctor visits, Jack's feelings show how uncomfortable he is in the outside world, showcasing how social deprivation affects his on daily basis once again. Even with his family members, he is uncomfortable with being held or hugged by another person than his mother. This illustrates how hard it is for him to feel more comfortable with new people around him at first.

Another aspect influencing Jack's social development is gender expectations, which he encounters after leaving Room. His astonishment around gender roles is clear when he recognises differences between genders but does not have the social context to fully understand them: "Lots and lots of hes and shes on the sidewalks, I never saw so many, I wonder are they all real for real or just some. 'Some of the women grow long hair like us,' I

¹² See chapter 2.1.3 of the theoretical part – “Social Development (in Early Childhood)” – for more information.

tell Ma, 'but the men don't'" (Donoghue 278). Here, Jack is surprised by the different appearances of men and women, realizing they might have different characteristics than he and his mother. Thus, one of the first things he learns about social conventions and stereotypes is that some traits, like having long hair, are associated with a certain gender in the real world. The fact that Jack is unaware of gender roles shows that they are not innate but rather imposed by society. His observations reveal how society teaches children what is expected of different genders. With Jack's refreshing perspective and his mother's indifference towards social stereotypes, Donoghue implicitly confronts these conventional gender roles.

Another example of this clash with expectations based on gender is his unwillingness to compromise when it comes to his toys or personal items that he is familiar with from the Room. He contradicts gender stereotypes by insisting on having a certain kind of bag:

'Maybe one that's not pink, ' says Paul to her. 'What about this one, Jack, pretty cool or what?' He's holding up a bag of Spider-Man.

I give Dora a big hug. I think she whispers, Hola, Jack.

Deana tries to take the Dora bag but I won't let her. (Donoghue 304)

Jack's determination to keep his Dora bag shows how much he does not comply to the social norms of men and women and how little he understands about these concepts. His reactions reveal his childhood innocence as well as his indifference towards labelling based on gender roles. Moment after, due to his long hair and pink bag, Jack is mistaken for a girl which adds to his confusion about gender stereotypes: "'Why she said older daughter?' I ask. 'Ah, it's your long hair and your Dora bag,' says Deana" (Donoghue 306). This incident demonstrates how gender expectations imposed onto Jack, who had never previously faced gender discrimination related to his appearance or personal items. His adoration of his Dora bag, which others view as girly, goes against gender standards, hence it leads to mistaking Jack for a girl. However, he does not fully understand the reasons behind it. By focussing on Jack's confusion, Donoghue illustrates the extent to which gender stereotypes are deeply engraved into society. The fact that Jack is attached to his Dora bag, which other people consider "girly", illustrates how even items are stereotypically classified based on gender.

Society continually imposes these stereotypes even in everyday situations, as seen by Jack being mistaken for a girl.

The limited knowledge of common social norms Jack has can be observed when he behaves in an inappropriate manner that was not expected or considered rude. Simple interaction manners that most children adopt during socialization, such as showing politeness, taking turns, or understanding unmentioned cues, are new to him: "'There's a buffet,' she says, 'you could have, let's see, waffles, omelette, pancakes...' I whisper, 'No.' 'You say, No, thanks,' says Ma, 'that's good manners' (Donoghue 222). Though seemingly unimportant, this particular event demonstrates how Jack has to put great effort in noticing communication signals that other children learn simply through watching and imitating people around them. Jack's directness comes from a lack of experience with social norms that regulate conversations outside of Room, rather than from rudeness.

Additionally, Jack has trouble with telling physical and personal boundaries. In Room, he and his mother depended on each other for warmth and comfort, therefore, touch and closeness were part of their relationship. However, when he is in the outside world, he fails to anticipate the reality that some forms of touch are unacceptable and inappropriate. This is made clear when Jack unintentionally violates certain boundaries by wanting to touch his younger cousin in an inappropriate manner:

Deana bangs my hand away. I can't stop screaming.

...

'But listen, we don't touch each other's private parts, that is not OK. OK? '

I don't know private parts.

'All done, Bronwyn? Let Momma wipe.'

She's rubbing the same bit of Bronwyn I did but she doesn't hit herself after.

(Donoghue 308)

This scene is noteworthy because it shows how Jack's lack of social experience may lead to his and others discomfort and awkward situations. Plus, not only he does not understand what he did wrong, he is confused that his aunt did seemingly the same as he, but without

consequences. Jack is not acting improperly on purpose, instead, his perception of physical boundaries is influenced by an environment in which differences between him and his mother did not matter. Even though the sudden correction of his behaviour is required, it makes him feel even more overwhelmed and shows how much his social environment has changed and how much he must learn.

Lastly, forming friendships with his peers is challenging for Jack because to the complete absence of opportunities for peer interactions in Room. Interactions with peers teach children important social skills such as empathy, collaboration, and negotiating, which are crucial for their development of social competence¹³. But while his first interactions with other children, Jack is avoidant and confused: "She whispers, 'Why don't you go play with the other boy now?' Then she calls out, 'Hi there.' The boy looks over at us, I go into a bush, it pricks me in the head" (Donoghue 326). Due to the absence of social interaction with other children in Room, Jack was used to participate in solitary play. However, this type of play offers fewer social learning chances than play with peers. Even though these activities make Jack feel safe and in charge, they impede his learning how to get along with other people. Initially, Jack shows his discomfort with socialisation by avoiding his peers instead of engaging with them. Despite these difficulties, Jack starts to show signs of social awareness and affection towards his family members and some other children. He creates relationship with his grandmother and step grandfather as well as his aunt, uncle and little cousin Bronwyn. These newly found connections help him to overcome especially difficult time he has to spent without his mother. Moreover, their presence, interest and both non-intentional and deliberate efforts to help him the navigate his new life. Nevertheless, sometimes his actions still need direction. For instance, when Jack wants to hug one boy on a playground, he accidentally knocks him down.

'Remember,' she says on the way to the white car, 'we don't hug strangers. Even nice ones.'

'Why not?'

'We just don't, we save our hugs for people we love.'

¹³ See chapter 2.1.3 of the theoretical part – “Social Development (in Early Childhood)” – for more information.

'I love that boy Walker.'

'Jack, you never saw him before in your life.' (Donoghue 359)

This interaction shows Jack's increasing desire to socialize. He is getting better at building connections and expressing affection to other people, but he still has troubles with understanding personal space and certain boundaries. Over time, as he meets with various individuals, he begins to integrate into this new world outside of Room and gradually acquires the basic skills that his isolation could never provide. Still, the effects of being confined as a child affects how he deals with other people. This shows how deeply his childhood in isolation and social deprivation impacted his social development.

What this further emphasises is that Jack, in spite of his traumatic and abnormal early childhood, is actually not that far behind in comparison to his peers. He seems to be able to adjust much quicker than one would expect because of his mother's tireless efforts in Room to make his upbringing as normal as possible. Donoghue seems to employ this to highlight his mother's strength and creativity, but it also raises questions about how accurately Jack's development is portrayed. While his challenges with social relationships, boundaries, and emotional control are understandable and anticipated, the quite fast speed of his progress and recovery appears overly optimistic. Since the novel only covers few weeks, Jack's quick improvement in so many areas of his development seems way too idealised. His mother's efforts in Room undoubtedly helped his development, but the depicted extent of his resilience and quick progress may have downplayed the foreseeable effects of his confinement. While Donoghue accomplishes an excellent task of bringing Jack to life, the novel tends to lean towards optimistic rather than a realistic picture of a victim of childhood trauma.

3.4 Impact of Captivity on Jack's Development

The crucial stages of Jack's development are significantly impacted by his confinement, affecting his ability to cope with trauma and to adjust to the outside world. His perception of safety is tied to his mother and to the environment of Room. Living in a

completely unfamiliar environment is overwhelming and makes Jack feel lost. It is hard for him to accept abandoning the one place he has ever known while also being suddenly exposed to new people, social norms, and large areas. These kinds of changes would be difficult to accept and navigate even for a child who underwent a standard developmental path. But Jack's strength and strong connection he has with his mother are very important in shaping his ability to heal and change in order to adjust to his new reality.

It is clear that Jack has not had the typical childhood and developmental experiences since he views Room as his whole world. He does not consider Room as a prison or even a constraint: "'Room's not small. Look.' I climb up on my chair and jump with my arms out and spin, I don't bang into anything" (Donoghue 140). His continued belief that Room is enough for him and his mother shows how trauma victims, especially children, adjust to abnormal and horrendous situations that change their views and perspectives. Jack's cognitive, social and emotional development is impeded by the absence of social interaction, learning stimuli and restricted sensory experiences. Despite the extreme limitations of Room, Jack has developed impressive cognitive abilities, which happened only thanks to his mother's conscious efforts. Her constant involvement in his learning process, whether through storytelling or establishing habits, provided Jack with the cognitive stimuli he needed to continue developing even in their confinement.

A great paradox of Jack's trauma is the fact that he sees Room as a safe place even after a while upon their escape. For Jack, Room represents familiarity, comfort, and protection. It is the only place he considered home, which is mind-blowing considering the atrocious conditions of their confinement. His mother purposefully created this sense of security, protecting him from the real horror of their circumstances so that he would not grow up in constant fear. After the escape, the anxiety about his new and unfamiliar surroundings makes him miss Room, where he could hide from the intense chaos of the outside world.¹⁴

The escape from Room is a moment of extreme psychological trauma for Jack. Not only is he without his mother for the first time in his life, but also the transition from his

¹⁴ See chapter 3.3.1 of the practical part – “Emotional Resilience, Attachment, and Coping mechanisms” – for more information.

limited but familiar environment to an uncontrolled and chaotic world causes instant sensory overload: "When I look down, the street is black and a long long way. I know to jump good but not when everything's roaring and bumping and the lights all blurry and the air so strange smells like apple or something. My eyes aren't working right, I'm too scared..." (Donoghue 174). His fear and disbelief reflect his inability to digest the sudden discovery of a completely different world, resulting in disorientation and anxiety. After the escape, Jack exhibits signs of mental as well as physical exhaustion: "After hundreds of hours Ma's standing me up, I'm all wobbly. Sleep not in Room makes me feel sick" (Donoghue 201). Jack's disorientation further demonstrates how stressful situations can have long-lasting effects.¹⁵

Even though Jack escaped from his confinement together with his mother, the danger that Old Nick represented still lingers. The fact that Jack is still afraid of him means he has not fully processed his time in captivity. Nightmares are one of the indicators that Jack continues to struggle with his trauma, which illustrates Berzoff's theory¹⁶ that painful memories cannot fade easily on their own but rather might become an integral part of one's identity. One way Jack copes with his traumas through play, which in certain occasions involves drawing and storytelling. "'What about the man you call Old Nick, is he anywhere?' 'OK, he can be over in this corner in his cage.' I do him and the bars very thick, he's biting them" (Donoghue 260). As a form of art therapy, Jack draws Old Nick who is confined behind bars, which might represent his wish to have more control over him during their previous encounters in Room, or simply the fact the fact that Jack knows Old Nick is held accountable for his acts. His fears become more manageable as he puts them down on paper. Generally, some types of play help children retrieve control over what they have experienced and act the experiences out or visualize them in a safe way.

In essence, the character of Jack seems to be suffering from Type II trauma¹⁷ as a result of his long-term confinement and repeated experience with psychological distress. His confinement has resulted in increased alertness, sensory deprivation, or difficulties with

¹⁵ See chapter 2.2 of the theoretical part – "Effects of Trauma and Captivity on Child Development" – for more information.

¹⁶ See chapter 2.2 of the theoretical part – "Effects of Trauma and Captivity on Child Development" – for more information.

¹⁷ See chapter 2.2 of the theoretical part – "Effects of Trauma and Captivity on Child Development" – for more information.

understanding new stimuli. Even after the successful escape from Room, Jack continues to struggle with the overwhelming reality of the outside world: "Dr. Clay says my eyes are super sharp but they're not used to looking far away yet, I need to stretch them out the window" (Donoghue 225). This shows how significantly environmental restrictions shaped his development and made even basic sensory experiences challenging. Dr. Clay confirms the extent of his social and sensory problems, while he also notices Jack's remarkable skills in literacy and numeracy: "...like a newborn in many ways, despite his remarkably accelerated literacy and numeracy,' he's saying to Ma. I'm listening hard because it's me that's the he. 'As well as immune issues, there are likely to be challenges in the areas of, let's see, social adjustment, obviously, sensory modulation - filtering and sorting all the stimuli barraging him - plus difficulties with spatial perception..." (Donoghue 226). Nonetheless, later in the novel, Dr. Clay highlights Jack's neuroplasticity, reassuring his mother that Jack has a chance on life without any developmental disabilities thanks to his young age: "The very best thing you did was, you got him out early. At five, they're still plastic" (Donoghue 260). Furthermore, it is crucial to note that Jack's mother did everything in her power to protect him during their time in confinement. One of many ways she managed to do was by limiting his exposure to Old Nick, their captor and Jack's biological father, to bare minimum, or by sacrificing her own well-being. She often went hungry when food was scarce and endured abuse from Old Nick to keep Jack safe.

Jack's journey, especially once free from Room, shows how resilient and adaptable he is in spite of difficult circumstances. His adaptation to the world outside is seen through his little but encouraging achievements, such as successfully walking down the stairs: "No but, I'm doing the stairs" (Donoghue 312). Regardless of his rescue in young age and the support of many people give him hope for recovery, his mental wounds are still obvious, which implies how complicated trauma is and how hard it is to heal. Donoghue portrays Jack as being on the right healing path to find a sense of security and trust as his involvement in therapy, play and eagerness for new experiences imply. That being said, it is important to consider whether Jack's progress, no matter how moving and comforting, is adequately portrayed in the novel and whether the novel addresses the possibility of further lasting challenges he might face in the future.

4 Conclusion

Upon its publication, the novel *Room* stirred quite harsh debate concerning its ethical perspective. Several people claimed that Donoghue exploited a sensitive subject in order to create her story, while others saw her work as a portrayal of uncomfortable but important issue. In my opinion, literature should be used to draw attention to relevant, though unsettling, topics. I believe, the novel does not sensationalise or exploit pain and suffering of victims of similar traumas and crimes. It rather points out the horrendous consequences of such exposure to traumatic event in a captivating and empathetic manner. The novel, even though inspired by true story, is ultimately a fictional narrative which explores survival, resilience, and special relationship between a child and his mother.

This study of the psychological development of Jack in the novel *Room* attempts to provide an insight into broader consequences of childhood isolation and the way a young child is coping with them. Developmental psychology enables us a way of studying how solitary confinement affects a child's comprehension of the world and their ability to change once they are no longer tied to one place. The study of Jack's psychological development is done by examining Jack's cognitive, emotional, and social development. Jack's case might be a fictional story, whereas it still provides a thought-provoking analysis of how confinement, transition into the outside world and associated trauma affect the development of a child. Given that Jack is the narrator, the novel offers an original perspective that allows us to observe directly how he constructs and understands the world around him.

Jack's language development in *Room* reveals how his confinement shaped and hindered his cognitive abilities as well as created some limitations. His mother's involvement not only in his cognitive development also helped expand his vocabulary. However, his speech stays egocentric and self-centred. Similarly to most children his age, Jack has difficulty with complicated grammar structures, formulating questions, and negation. Nevertheless, the most significant challenge arises once he escapes from Room as he is forced how to suddenly deal with communication outside of familiar environment, without his mother and with complete strangers. His struggles with communication indicate how language development involves considerably more than mere vocabulary acquisition. It is

also about being able to communicate properly in social interactions, which he was absent from.

Jack's understanding of the world is strongly influenced by his restricted environment, because his early experience is strictly limited to Room. His cognitive development undergoes important changes as he learns how to differentiate between imagination and reality. In Room, Jack believes everything inside Room is real and everything else is just imaginary until his mother tells him about the outside world. As his world expands beyond Room, his inability to distinguish between the real and the imagined affects his understanding of the new idea of world beyond the Rooms walls. Despite his lack of first-hand experience with the Outside, Jack uses available resources, particularly television, as references to newly discovered truth about the world. This habit stays with him even as he starts to get used to life in the outside world, helping him to navigate the unfamiliar.

Jack's emotional development is significantly influenced by his early confinement and later exposure to the outside world just as his cognitive development is. His attachment to his mother begins as insecure-ambivalent-resistant type, but as he develops other connections, he progressively changes it to secure attachment pattern. He faces difficulties with frustration caused by overwhelming number of new experiences and the tremendous change in his life. Consequently, his temper, tantrums, and emotional dysregulation naturally reflect that. Yet as Jack connects with his family and other people, his emotional regulation and empathy increases despite few setbacks along the way. Jack's experience illustrates how much a child's emotional development is shaped by and responsive to their surroundings.

Social development that Jack undergoes is extremely demanding since he goes from extreme isolation to fast integration into society. As a result of his confinement in Room, he struggles with establishing relationships with his family and peers and he has to cope with social norms he has no experience with. His first interactions in the outside world are full of anxiety, miscommunication and confusion. Although, as Jack gradually gets to experience different social situations, he starts to grasp the social conventions and learn about boundaries. Thanks to the support of his mother, grandmother, and other carers, Jack improves his social skills and learns how to deal with the complex social interactions.

Through his character, Donoghue showcases the enormous impact of early social deprivation, but also the great child's ability to learn and adapt.

One of the novel's greatest and most striking paradoxes is Jack's lack of comprehension how abnormal and haunting his situation is. Given that Room is his only experience of reality, he does not really question its constraints or dangers. Moreover, he considers Room a safe place even after the escape as he connects it with feelings of safety, which the outside world with its overwhelming qualities does not provide. This contradiction intensifies the emotional effect of the novel as readers realise the seriousness and paradox of his situation and feelings even if he does not. His innocent descriptions of Room are disturbing in view of the fact that what he views as home is a prison. Even after his escape, his deep affection towards Room and fear of the outside world highlight how significantly confinement affected him, establishing an unsettling paradox he cannot comprehend yet. However, later in life, Jack might be forced to confront the dreadful truth that Old Nick is his biological father, which undoubtedly would be a painful realization that could lead to a serious psychological distress.

A fundamental question that arises throughout the analysis of Jack's development is whether such quick developmental progress would be achievable in a real-life case. Considering Jack's haunting and traumatic situation, his rapid development appears nearly impossible, despite his mother's best attempts. His ability to learn expansive vocabulary and develop critical thinking skills in such a harsh environment stems from his mother's innovative and truly creative practices. However, when it comes to his unbelievably quick progress and transition into the outside world, the credibility of Jack's developmental progress begins to decline. Similar remarks can be made about how quickly he is developing emotionally and socially while he is simultaneously battling the trauma related to his confinement, escape and overwhelming nature of the outside world. It feels utmost questionable. This aspect of the novel challenges the plausibility of such developmental progress together with a child's trauma recovery. By portraying Jack's recovery journey as quick and almost linear, Donoghue seems to sometimes oversimplify the profound and long-lasting psychological challenges that real-life confinement victims cope with and potentially, thought unintentionally, downplay the severe and lasting consequences of such traumatic experience.

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