

Exploring the Concept of Parental Influence and Its Consequences in Alex Michaelides's *The Silent Patient*

S. Banupriya¹, B.R. Aravind^{2,*}

Abstract

The present paper explores the relationship between attachment theory, parental alienation (PA), and the Parental Acceptance and Rejection Theory (PART), as illustrated by Theo Faber and Alicia Berenson in "The Silent Patient." The definition of PA and its effects on child development are covered first, with a focus on the importance of attachment types and parental involvement. Echoing the conclusions of attachment theorists and empirical research, the essay emphasizes how insufficient parental care can result in attachment anxieties and emotional dysregulation. Moving on to PART, it delves into the aspects of parental approval and disapproval, elucidating how parental actions mold kids' identities and coping strategies. The essay demonstrates how these early dynamics materialize in maladaptive behaviours and psychological disorders in adulthood by analysing Theo and Alicia's painful childhood experiences, especially parental rejection and neglect. This emphasizes the significant influence of parenting on personal development by drawing comparisons between theoretical frameworks and real-life stories. This aligns with Theo Faber's claim that our personalities are created by invisible influences, primarily our parents. The importance of PART is reaffirmed in the conclusion, along with its significance in comprehending the intricacies of familial relationships and their long-term effects on mental health and general wellbeing. All things considered, this abstract clarifies the significant impact of family dynamics on psychological adjustment and personality development by combining intricate theories with narrative representations.

Keywords: Parental influence, psychological imbalance, parental rejection, consequences, alienation

INTRODUCTION

A mental illness known as parental alienation (PA) occurs when a child, typically whose parents are divorcing or separated after a high-conflict separation, strongly supports one parent (the favored parent) and refuses to have a relationship with the other parent (the alienated parent) for no apparent reason. The favored parent's brainwashing of the child to fear or despise the estranged parent is the most

*Author for Correspondence

B.R. Aravind

E-mail: aravind.abur@gmail.com

¹Assistant Professor, Department of English Kalasalingam Academy of Research and Education, Tamil Nadu, India

²Assistant Professor, Department of English, Kalasalingam Academy of Research and Education, Tamil Nadu, India

Received Date: April 29, 2024

Accepted Date: May 06, 2024

Published Date: May 14, 2024

Citation: S. Banupriya, B.R. Aravind. Exploring the Concept of Parental Influence and Its Consequences in Alex Michaelides's *The Silent Patient*. Recent Trends in Social Studies. 2024; 1(2): 24–29p.

frequent cause of PA (Bernet, 2020a, pp. 5–6) [1]. This is a general definition that practically all PA supporters and detractors agree upon. Since Richard Gardner initially described parental alienation syndrome (PAS), the following premise has been evident: The idea of parental alienation syndrome encompasses elements that lead to the child's alienation from the parent, both conscious and subconscious. Moreover—and this is crucial—it takes into account elements that emerge in the child separately from the parental inputs that aid in the syndrome's development. (Page 3 of Gardner, 1985) [2].

Being a "good enough" parent is severely limited by an ongoing substance addiction problem. According to several studies (Fonagy, Steele, Steele, Moran, & Higgitt, 1991; Slade, Grienemberger, Bernbach, Levy, & Locker, 2005; Sroufe, Egeland, Carlson, & Collins, 2005) [3,4,5], an infant requires perceptive and alert caregivers who can decipher and react to her various signals. A baby's affective communication during the early years fosters and supports the establishment of an attachment link between her parents (Schoré & Newton, 2013) [6]. The ability of the parent to foster independence and curiosity in secure environments and to offer security and comfort in frightful circumstances determines the strength of the attachment link (Cassidy, 2008) [7].

The source of safety and support, however, might incite anxiety in the little child, making the situation unmanageable if the parent's behavior is perceived as terrifying (Main & Solomon, 1990; Solomon & George, 2011a; Van Ijzendoorn, Schuengel, & Bakermans-Kranenburg, 1999) [8,9]. This kind of insufficient care, in accordance with attachment theory, substantially jeopardizes not only the formation of a stable attachment connection but also the acquisition of several strategies necessary for effective social interaction (Solomon & George, 2011b) [10].

Effective support for managing emotions is crucial for children from birth onwards, as stated by Bariola, Hughes, and Gullone (2012) [11]. Children that struggle in this area run the danger of developing into socially nervous and withdrawn individuals or violent and hostile individuals (Cumberland-Li, Eisenberg, Champion, Gershoff, & Fabes, 2003; Frick & Morris, 2004; Howe, 2005; Silk, Steinberg, & Morris, 2003) [12–15]. Compared to children with an insecure attachment system, those with a secure attachment system use more adaptive emotion regulation techniques (Mikulincer, Shaver, & Pereg, 2003) [16]. Predictable patterns of care are crucial for a child's emotional development, and from a young age, she will form distinct expectations about her relationship with her parents (Beebe et al., 2010) [17]. According to research by Burnett, Jones, Bliwise, & Ross (2006) [18] and Ross & Hill (2004) [19], there is a higher likelihood that children raised by parents who abuse drugs will experience high levels of stress, unpredictability, and fear in certain situations.

These kids can find it challenging to parent when they grow up and become parents. According to several studies (Anda et al., 2006; Conger, Belsky, & Capaldi, 2009) [20,21]; Main, Kaplan, & Cassidy, 1985; Meins, 1999; Slade, Grienemberger, Bernbach, Levy, & Locker, 2005) [22–24], one of the most important indicators of parenting behavior is how parents were raised. Numerous studies have shown that a woman's inability to parent successfully is frequently linked to her history of negative childhood experiences (Moehler, Biringen, & Poustka, 2007) [25]; Steele et al., 2016 [26]

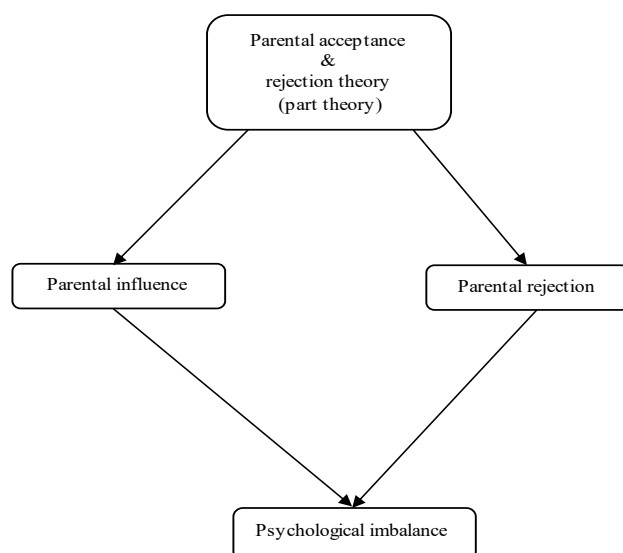


Figure 1. Mirroring PART Theory.

The Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children found that when mothers reported experiencing severe maltreatment as a kid, their children's adjustment issues were more persistent. According to Collishaw, Dunn, O'Connor, and Golding (2007) [27], the impacts were cumulative in that difficulties in the kids were more severe when the mother had experienced multiple forms of abuse as opposed to just one. Individuals' unique attachment styles have a big impact on how their parental roles develop. Research indicates that insecure attachment styles are linked to several unfavorable parental behaviors, including low levels of participation (Coyl et al., 2010); lack of predictability (Coyl, Newland, & Freeman, 2010; Kilmann, Vendemia, Parnell, & Urbaniak, 2009) [28,29]. (Feeney,2002) [30]. According to a review by Mikulincer, those with securely attached attachment styles have the ability to use their emotions in a more positive and productive way than those with insecure attachment styles.

DISCUSSION

Parenting is the social, emotional, and physical assistance parents give their kids. It deals with the complexities of nurturing a child from infancy to adulthood. One of the most important factors in how an adult integrates into society as an individual is their parenting. Parental Acceptance and Rejection Theory, which was put forth by Rohner [31], illustrates the effects of parental acceptance and rejection through its sub-theories of personality, coping, and sociocultural systems as shown in figure 1. This theory, which is grounded in empirical research, aims to forecast and clarify the main effects of parental acceptance or rejection. The warmth, love, care, attention, and support and comfort that permeate the loving relationship between a parent and their kid are all part of the warmth dimension of parenting.

The absence of these emotions and behaviors is found in the second dimension, which is parental rejection. According to the PART Theory, a child may encounter parental rejection in one of four main ways:

1. Cold and unaffectionate
2. Hostile and aggressive
3. Indifferent and neglecting,
4. Undifferentiated rejection.

The Personality sub-theory of the PART Theory proposed that youngsters develop a pathological dependence on a significant person as their thirst for positive responses grows. This sub-theory states that children who experience inadequate warmth from their parents grow up to be worried and insecure. Neglected parenting can also lead to undesirable personality effects in adulthood, such as violence, immaturity, anger, low self-esteem, and a pessimistic outlook on the world.

Similar to this, in the book *The Silent Patient*, the pathological dependence of both main characters, Theo Faber and Alicia Berenson, and their psychological imbalance stem mostly from their harsh childhood rearing. First things first: Alicia's childhood trauma was a contributing factor in her mental illness, which ultimately led her to kill her husband, Gabriel. Alicia had a lengthy past of mental illness, which she attributed to her early trauma. When her mother passed away, everything began. Eva, Alicia's mother, passed away in a vehicle crash. Alicia was in the car too, but she made it out alive. Her parents had left her with the initial emotional scar.

According to Alicia, what her mother did to her was an attempt to murder her as her mother intentionally brought Alicia with her and made the terrible car crash. After her mother's death, her father Vernon's love for her mother turned into hatred on Alicia. Vernon became an alcoholic and started to neglect and abuse Alicia verbally. Vernon once said that "My girl, my poor girl Eva...Why did she have to die? Why did it have to be her? Why didn't Alicia die instead?". This mentally killed Alicia which was expressed through her words, "He killed me. Dad just-killed me", after hearing what her father feels about her presence. This behavior of Vernon comes under the Parental Rejection as this expresses the emotions of hostility and aggressiveness which psychically condemned his daughter to death.

Exactly this emotion and incident was recreated by Alicia's husband Gabriel which eventually triggered her to kill her husband as a result of the psychological imbalance. Because of the wrong parenting and verbal abuse, Alicia happened to develop a pathogenic love and dependence on her husband. Alicia strongly believed that her husband was the only a person who can provide her with the unconditional love, care, and warmth she has been seeking since her childhood. But one day a stranger broke into her house, tied her to a chair, and threatened her and her husband, Gabriel with a gun. When Gabriel was threatened to choose between his life and Alicia's. Gabriel has chosen himself; he simply decided to let Alicia die in his place.

After this, the stranger untied Alicia and left the place whereas Alicia was frozen on hearing what her husband said. Alicia became the victim of emotional instability and killed her husband by shooting them five times in his face. The only thing that Alicia couldn't accept was the fact that she was sentenced to death. Ever since the incident of killing her husband, Alicia had never spoken even a word. According to Alicia, she was already dead and the person who killed her now was her husband. Alicia even had the fear of having a child because she has the fear that her mother's madness might be inside her too. Alicia was found near her husband's dead body deep cuts across her wrists, bleeding hard. Alicia fought off the attempts to save her life.

Despite suffering significant blood loss, she was spared. She painted a self-portrait following her husband's passing and gave it the name ALCESTIS in honor of a Greek mythological figure. Alicia has previously said that she has never felt completely at ease speaking; instead, she thinks and expresses herself through photographs. Following Gabriel's demise, the court decided that she should be admitted to The Grove and monitored by Professor Diomedes, the clinical director of The Grove and an Imperial College professor of forensic psychiatry. This decision was based on Gabriel's muteness and expressionless countenance.

She lost a lot of blood, yet she was still alive. Alicia has stated in the past that she thinks and communicates herself through pictures rather than speaking because she has never felt totally comfortable doing it. After Gabriel passed away, the court determined that she should be brought to The Grove and under the care of Professor Diomedes, the clinical director of the facility and forensic psychiatry professor at Imperial College. Gabriel was silent and had a blank expression on his face when this decision was made. Theo never felt safe with his horrible, violent father. Theo's psychological equilibrium was destroyed by his father's physical and mental abuse. Theo's mental health declined as a result of his abusive father and untrustworthy mother. Theo had inserted his father's shrill praise, accusing him of being a complete failure, ugly, shameful, and useless. The voice became so severe during Theo's time in college that it rendered him unable to move or interact with others. The violent comments that came from his father's mouth were ingrained in Theo's subconscious and held immense power over him. Theo purchased several packets of paracetamol at this time, and it required a great deal of effort to consume them all at once.

Theo, who experienced psychological turmoil and violence from his parents, felt powerless and made the decision to end his own life. In the end, he was spared. Fortunately, Ruth, a psychotherapist, was able to alleviate his psychiatric condition. The only person he grew close to in terms of warmth, honesty, and respect was Ruth. He never received the warmth and comfort that Ruth gave him. The voice that had been frightening Theo began to gradually fade away. Since it disappeared momentarily, if something caused it to arise, it may possibly occur in another manner.

In both situations, the person's psychological maladjustment was caused by the father's abusive upbringing. According to PART Theory, evidence from every class in the study points to the father's love—shown through his acceptance or rejection of his children—having an equally powerful influence on the emergence of behavioral or psychological issues in his offspring. When the youngster grows into an adult and starts to need more of the feeling of a good response from the important person, it could have negative effects on their personality or cause psychological adjustment issues.

As the story goes on, it becomes clear that Theo was the stranger who broke into Alicia and Gabriel's home and set off Alicia's emotions. Theo is acting in this way in an attempt to keep his wife Kathy by his side forever. His early tragedy led to the development of a pathological love for his wife, Kathy. Kathy and Gabriel were dating concurrently. Theo discovers that his wife has been unfaithful to him after inadvertently reading Kathy's messages on her laptop. Theo's psychological struggles begin here. This terrible reality set off Theo's traumatizing emotions, and his father's voice began to reappear. Theo made the decision to murder Gabriel, but he eventually changed his mind. Theo wanted Alicia to know the truth about her husband, but his actions caused Alicia to be in a pitiful state and resulted in Gabriel's tragic death.

CONCLUSION

In summary, it is clear that Theo and Alicia's psychological maladjustment and personality problems were largely influenced by the parenting styles they had. "The development of our personalities doesn't take place in isolation, but in relationship with another-we is shaped and completed by unseen, unremembered forces: namely our parents" (The Silent Patient, page 17). Theo Faber's quote captures the essence of parenting and all of its ramifications. They harmed others and themselves because they were unable to handle the situation appropriately. According to the PART Theory, these characters' psychological decline was caused by parental rejection or neglect.

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