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Unmasking the Insecure Attachments in *Gone Girl* and *The Silent Patient*

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Abstract

*The psychological thriller is a subgenre of thriller, which often includes crime, mental illness and unreliable narrators. It reflects the dark side and breaks the stereotypes in the society. In literature it aims to reflect the darker side of humans and their minds through the characters. It reflects the tension and complexities of relationships in the family. It explores the deepest thoughts and motivations of the characters. This is well expressed by Gillian Flynn and Alex Michaelides in their novels *Gone Girl* and *The Silent Patient* respectively. In *Gone Girl*, Amy's mysterious disappearance turns her husband Nick, into a suspect, but the truth is shocking for manipulation and hidden darkness. In *The Silent Patient*, Alicia, a renowned artist murders her husband in silence and becomes obsessed with unlocking the secrets buried in her past and mind. The present article explores on how characters form emotional bonds and attachments with others by magnifying with the psychological lens called Attachment theory.*

Keywords: Attachment Theory, Darkness, Insecurity and Suspense.

Introduction

Psychology has always been a rich vein for literature. The Eighteenth century of modern psychology with psychiatrist like Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung delves with unconscious mind, dreams and personality. This scientific approach to understanding human thoughts and behaviours provided rich framework. Authors delved into motivations, desires, and mental states, creating a deeper psychological complexity. They explored themes of guilt, repression, and societal pressures on the psyche. Literature, particularly the novel, began to move away from purely external actions and explore the inner world of characters.

Review of Literature

Literature often examines how characters' early experiences shape their attachment patterns and interpersonal relationships later in life. Traumatic events, loss, or disruptions in caregiving during childhood can significantly impact characters' attachment styles and influence their behaviour and emotional well-being throughout the narrative. Authors may use attachment theory to develop complex

characters, deepen narrative conflict, and explore themes such as identity, resilience, and the search for belonging.

Methodology

Attachment theory is a psychological theory about how humans form emotional bonds with others, particularly in close relationships. In literature, it delves into the psychological framework developed by John Bowlby and later expanded upon by Mary Ainsworth. It emphasises the importance of early childhood experiences with caregivers in shaping how one connects with others throughout life. It provides a psychological justification for the interpersonal and emotional ties that bind individuals together. One of the central themes explored through attachment theory in literature is the parent-child relationship. Characters may exhibit different attachment styles, such as secure, insecure-avoidant, insecure-anxious, or disorganized, based on their early interactions with caregivers.

Attachment theory sheds light on the dynamics of romantic relationships depicted in literature. Characters may exhibit behaviours and patterns reflective of their attachment styles, such as seeking closeness, fearing intimacy, or exhibiting ambivalence. Literature may explore how characters' attachment histories influence their romantic choices, conflicts, and emotional responses within relationships. It also extends to friendships and social bonds. Characters may form attachments with friends or other significant figures that mirror their attachment patterns developed in childhood. For instance, a character with a secure attachment style might foster trusting and supportive friendships, while a character with an insecure attachment style might struggle with dependency or distrust.

Insecure Attachment

Literature can delve into the consequences of insecure attachment. It can portray characters struggling with intimacy, trust, or self-worth due to early relational difficulties. This allows readers to connect with these experiences and gain insights into attachment's impact in literature often embodying different attachment styles such as secure, anxious, avoidant, and disorganized based on their experiences and behaviours. Readers can see how these styles influence their relationships and decision-making. Analysing characters through this lens adds depth to literary understanding. It is concerned with the relationships between people. The early experience with caregivers shapes individuals style and their relationships throughout life. This was analysed through the characters of Amy and Nick in the novel *Gone Girl* and Alicia in the novel *The Silent Patient* respectively.

Both novels are related to Attachment theory which explains the insecure relationships. The early experience with caregivers shapes individual's style and their relationships throughout life. This was analysed through the characters of Amy and Nick in the novel *Gone Girl* and Alicia in the novel *The Silent Patient*. Attachment theory concerning relationships with humans believes that children need to develop a relationship with atleast one caregiver to develop the emotional and psychological aspects of the person. Likewise, the character Amy Elliot Dunne in *Gone Girl*, relationship with parents shows insecure attachment from her childhood. To begin with, the writer focuses on one main character named, Amy. The following quote, As a child, I got a vibrant pleasure out of this: just me, just me, only me (298). She was the only child of Rand and Marybeth Elliot. Further it was explained through the following quotes,

I've always been better than the Hopes. I was the one who made it. But
I've always been jealous too, always-seven dead dancing princesses.
They get to be perfect without even trying, without even facing one
moment of existence, while I am stuck here on earth, and every day I must
try, and every day is a chance to be less than perfect. (Flynn,299)

The above quote mentions that Amy's parents refer to their prior seven miscarriages as hope, but this time she was able to enter the world at birth. As a result, she was always the perfect one for their parents. Amy tends to put too much pressure on herself to be the best. She is worn out from the living world that her parents unconsciously shaped for her. Amy draws a comparison between herself and the deceased women who seem flawless to her. This continual comparison suggests the need for an outside validation source, which is a characteristic of insecure attachment patterns. Amy emphasizes her achievements as proof of her worth.

I thought of my mother. Was she crazy? Is that why she did it? Why she strapped me into the passenger seat of her yellow mini and sped us toward that redbrick wall? I always liked that car, its cheerful canary yellow. The same yellow as in my paint box. Now I hate that colour time I use it, I think of death. Why did she do it? I suppose I'll never know. I used to think it was suicide. Now I think it was attempted murder. Because I was in the car too, wasn't I? Sometimes I think I was the intended victim-it was me she was trying to kill, not herself. But this is crazy. Why would she want to kill me? (Michaelides,67)

The above quotation refers to Alicia's mother's possible suicide attempt, a terrible incident in her early years. A child's sense of safety and security may be disturbed by such an encounter, which may result in an insecure attachment style. Alicia questions her mother's sanity and motives by highlighting a lack of understanding and trust. It may be challenging to establish wholesome, trustworthy connections when one has an insecure attachment style. Alicia is confused about her safety and worth in her mother's eyes as she tries to figure out if she is the intended victim. This is consistent with the tendency for people who are insecurely attached to have a wobbly sense of self-worth.

Though neither quote specifically refers to early life events, both characters exhibit behaviours that may be associated with insecure attachment types. Amy is constantly comparing, a desire for outside approval, and underlying envy point to an insecure attachment style, which can show itself as controlling behaviour and relationship issues. On the other hand, Alicia's inability to trust and build healthy connections may be impacted by an insecure attachment style, which could be indicated by potential trauma, uncertainty about her mother's conduct, and an unstable sense of self.

I'd never felt like a person because I was always a product. Amazing Amy had to be brilliant, creative, kind, thoughtful, witty, and happy. (Flynn, 302)

The above quote describes Amy who is the wife of Nick Dunne from the novel *Gone Girl*. She is characterised as a charming, intelligent, and refined individual. She seems quite normal, and her husband says she's a wonderful wife who handles household duties like cooking just like any other woman.

Amy peered at the crepe sizzling in the pan and licked something off her wrist. She looked triumphant, wifely. If I took her in my arms, she would smell like berries and powdered sugar (Flynn,9).

In Attachment Theory, individuals with insecure attachment styles might seek external validation by fulfilling stereotypical roles to gain approval. Nick expresses his desire for closeness, when he says he wants to love Amy. But there is a detached quality to the whole section, as Nick concentrates more on what she smells than her feelings. This may point to an underlying anxiety of closeness, which is a feature of insecure attachment types. This passage raises the possibility that Amy's attachment style is insecure. Her emphasis on getting approval from others by playing the usual wifely role and her feeling of inauthenticity point to difficulty making real connections. Nick's insecure attachment style may be the cause of his need for intimacy mixed with a feeling of alienation.

In *Gone Girl*, the main characters Amy and Nick display complex attachment dynamics that drive the plot forward. Amy's upbringing, heavily influenced by her parent's fictionalized depiction of her in the *Amazing Amy* book series, sets the stage for her manipulative and calculating behaviour. Her need for control and perfection stems from her desire to fulfil the expectations placed upon her, mirroring aspects of an anxious-preoccupied attachment style. On the other hand, Nick's detachment and lack of empathy suggest characteristics of a dismissive-avoidant attachment style, possibly rooted in his strained relationship with his parents.

Similarly, in *The Silent Patient*, the protagonist Alicia's traumatic childhood and her subsequent attachment to her husband Gabriel play a pivotal role in the unfolding mystery. Alicia's silence following the murder of her husband reflects her attempt to cope with overwhelming emotions, reminiscent of someone with a fearful-avoidant attachment style. Gabriel's possessiveness and controlling behaviour towards Alicia point to elements of an anxious-preoccupied attachment style, stemming from his own insecurities and unresolved issues.

These connection-dynamics are exploited by the psychological thriller genre to build tension and intrigue. The viewer is drawn further into the character's minds as the stories carry on, exposing layers of fraud, manipulation, and hidden motivations. The protagonists' attachment-related vulnerabilities become integral to the plot twists and turns, keeping the audience engaged until the final reveal. In conclusion, *Gone Girl* and *The Silent Patient* both effectively combine aspects of psychological suspense and attachment theory, showing how early experiences with connections influence an adult's conduct and social interactions. These novels provide an engaging examination of human psychology and the complexities of attachment dynamics through complex characters and riveting stories. Both novels offer compelling social commentary on relationships, identity, and the darker aspects of human nature, drawing on psychological thriller elements and attachment theory to explore these themes.

Conclusion

Both *Gone Girl* and *The Silent Patient* analysed through the lens of attachment theory, particularly insecure attachment styles. Amy's meticulous plan and manipulation stem from an insecure attachment style, likely anxious or fearful-avoidant. Her idealised portrayal in the *Amazing Amy* books reflects an unmet need for approval and validation. Nick's infidelity further deepens her sense of insecurity and fuels her desire for control. The unresolved conclusion reinforces the complexities of their insecure bond.

Nick is trapped in a loveless marriage, constantly on guard. Amy maintains control through manipulation, creating a dysfunctional and unsettling equilibrium. Alicia's silence likely stems from a traumatic event alluded to in her diary. This trauma could have led to an insecure attachment style, making her withdraw emotionally and resort to violence. Theo's obsession with the case suggests his potential attachment issues. The unanswered questions about Alicia's past leave room for interpretation. Her silence may be a defense mechanism against confronting past trauma or a way to control the narrative. Without addressing these issues, a healthy relationship seems impossible. The diary entry in both novels explores the innermost thoughts of Amy and Alicia. In the case of Amy, it demonstrates a troubled attachment to her parents, characterized by manipulation and emotional distance.

In both novels, the characters struggle with intimacy and trust, hallmarks of insecure attachment. They are unable to form secure and healthy bonds, leading to destructive behaviours. The endings leave the characters trapped in unhealthy cycles, reflecting the challenges of overcoming insecure attachment patterns without therapy and self-awareness.

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