

The Essence of Psychoanalysis and Ethics of Care in

The Silent Patient by Alex Machaelides

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ABSTRACT

Psychoanalysis is a prominent theory that deals with the theory of the human brain. Sigmund Freud is the founder of this Psychoanalysis theory of the brain. He was a doctor and a research scholar. His works have created a great impact on psychology as well as on the western culture. Carol Gilligan developed the theory of Ethics of Care; this gives a vivid description of women's mind which seeks for care and relationships rather than some random abstract principles. The thriller *The Silent Patient* deals with the patient, Alicia who is very silent throughout her entire therapy and how she is being dealt by Theo Faber, a therapist who has volunteered to handle this specific case. This paper deals with the psychological perspective of not just the patient Alicia but also the therapist Theo Faber. The Ethics of Care deals with the feminine perspective of women seeking care and affections in a relationship. But it is applicable for men as well, as they too want some attention from their partners and that is evident from this novel. Though this novel is clearly in the thriller genre, when viewed from a different point of view it deals with the relationship trauma of both men and women. It also deals with the psychological perspective of both men and women from the societal point of view and from their own point of view. Although being a Psychologist, Faber himself suffers a lot of emotional turmoil in his relationships and even though Alicia is in a very happy

relationship she ends up murdering her husband. So, both Psychology and Ethics of Care are analysed in this article through Alex Michaelides' thriller *The Silent Patient*.

Keywords: Psychoanalysis, Ethics of care, Freud, Gilligan, Therapist, Relationship, trauma

The Silent Patient by Alex Michaelides is a thriller. However, the most promising theme in this novel is psychoanalysis, whereas the Ethics of Care is unsung in this novel. This novel is based on a patient called Alicia, who is termed as a Silent Patient, since she has chosen to remain silent after killing her husband. Though she is silent (without talking through words) she expresses her thoughts through non-verbal actions. She expresses her feelings through paintings. Her paintings speak louder than her words. The other character is Theo Faber. Even though he is a psychiatrist in this novel he wishes to solve the case of Alicia. He himself is a silent patient as well, as deep down, he suffers a traumatic lifestyle.

Alicia chooses to remain silent after murdering her husband Gabriel brutally with gun (Michaelides, 2019). Theo investigates Alicia's case. The reason behind his voluntariness towards Alicia's case is not mentioned in the beginning of the novel. But at the end one can spot it out and that is the twist in this novel's plot. Though *The Silent Patient* is a thriller, it brings out deep knowledge and understanding. The characters have hidden trauma inside them deep down. The pain and suffering that the characters undergo are huge. And that exactly makes them suffer as adults. The trauma faced by them while they were children, unhealed, leads to a drastic downfall in their lives.

Sigmund Freud believed that one's unconscious thoughts, desires and trauma will truly be based upon one's childhood experience. Here both Alicia and Theo Faber have faced lots of childhood trauma that have made them and shaped them to their current version. Alicia as a child, faces lots of trauma; she grows up without the love and care from both of her parents. Her mother dies in a car accident, and her father creates trauma in the life of Alicia; he even says that Alicia should have died in the car accident,

instead of her mother. So, he hates Alicia for no reason. That creates a great scar in the mind, heart and soul of Alicia that cannot be cured at any cause.

Likewise, Theo's relationship with his parents is also a strained one. He cannot resist the physical and emotional abuse of his father and is completely helpless. His mother neither cares nor has concern for Theo Faber. She denies and ignores the suffering of Theo as a child. That makes him the kind of person he grows up into. The act of abandonment and neglect from his mother makes him create deep feelings of inadequacy and resentment.

Both Alicia and Theo Faber face an 'emotional vacuum', which means a state of emptiness and emotional neglect. It often stems from a lack of emotional support or connections. This later leads to feelings of isolation, reclusion, emptiness and difficulty in expressing or understanding emotions. These childhood experiences shape the current version of the adult.

Alicia escapes her childhood sufferings through the mode of painting. She paints off her emotions through her drawings. Paintings become her way of expressing her emotions since verbal communication is difficult to her. Her most significant work, *Alcestis*, symbolizes her inner turmoil and unspoken pain and suffering.

Theo, as a teenager, shifts his consciousness to drugs to escape moments of pain and sufferings. He turns to 'Marijuana' as a coping mechanism to reem his pain and anxiety. The specific use of this drug highlights his struggle to deal with his emotions and his attempt to escape reality. The teenagers in the current generation are also addicted towards certain activities, mainly to escape current realities. Escaping current reality makes it worse than imagined. Though facing that might need greater guts, that would benefit that person in the long run. But ignoring that would lead to the collapsing of the emotional peace in future. Such traumatic upbringing makes him control his relationships. He even tries to manipulate Alicia through his power.

Freudian psychoanalysis is applicable to *The Silent Patient*. Apart from being analysed in psychological perspective, the Ethics of Care can also be used in this novel. It focuses on relationship, responsibility and responses. Digging out the essence of responsibility (Sharing views on good care), *The Silent Patient* also has a plot twist if analysed apart from its main thriller genre and its title. Even though Theo is a psychiatrist to the audience, he is a silent patient if analysed deep down. He had his repressed self and that has created his traumatic present self.

The Ethics of Care is how people should take responsibility in their relationship. It emphasizes caring actions and shows interpersonal connections over abstract rules and individual rights. It is a normal ethical theory developed by psychologist Carol Gilligan in the 1980's. It was developed by some feminists and environmentalists. Ethics of Care focuses mainly on the care and affections that people hold on in their relationships. It emphasizes the importance of relationships, empathy and the responsibility in moral decision making in a relationship. Carol is an American feminist, ethicist and psychologist and she is best known for her ethical community and ethical relationships (Sharing views on good care).

Care and Ethics is a very important thing to be noted in any relationship. But Alicia's life is not a good one; she suffered a lot as child and as an adult that makes her more vulnerable. She often lets out her emotions through paintings. The Care and Ethics is an important theory that talks about people connecting with others emotionally rather than practically. Being practical is good but emotional support is much needed for every human. Even the most practical person in the room is easily hypnotised by emotional connectivity (Gilligan). The importance of Care and Ethics is basically a feminist concept. But here it is seen that Theo also needs Care and Ethics desperately (Alex). It is not only applicable to only females but also to men.

Alicia's childhood is not very good. She marries Gabriel, though he is not a caring person. He ignores Alicia every single time she wants to talk openly, always has a very good sexual relationship and

physical intimacy with Alicia but not an emotional connect. Women always need emotional connect rather than anything else. Gabriel searched for another relationship with Theo Faber's wife.

Even though the conscious memory is important for a relationship, the unconscious memory shapes the lifestyle of a person. Even though both Alicia and Theo Faber have good partners, their lives are a total mess. The Ethics of Care focusses on context rather than universal rules. Universal rules are good on one side but on the other aspect it is not fair when it is followed throughout the entire life. There should be some flexibility in people's lives. Life without flexibility would lead to unnecessary traumas and heart breaks.

Alicia's life is one such; she had a past traumatising childhood in her early days. That subconsciously affects her mental state, and it literally shapes her future. Superego is the morality principle one holds on to one's life. Ego is the consciousness of what one tends to do in our lives and finally Id is the unconscious desires we have for certain stuffs. All Id, Ego and Superego should be aligned in a proper way for a human to behave like a six-sensed being.

Id desires everything and Superego reminds a person of his moral values. Ego channelises everything. It literally makes sure that that person gets the required desires / self-satisfaction adhering to the moral rules.

If a person lets Id to completely dominate his life, his life would be always driven by pleasure principles, and it is not good for that person to sustain in the environment with such values. He tends to do something impulsively without looking back at the consequences. On the other side, if a person is always driven by superego, he would himself hate the life he lives, constantly looking for all the morality values that are fixed by the earthly creatures. So, Ego takes its turn and makes life better for all human beings most of the times.

In Alicia's life, she is driven by Id principle at the time she shoots her husband Gabriel to death. She cannot accept the fact that Gabriel chose her death, to spare his own life. She is completely unconscious and is driven only by her unconscious memory. All her subconscious things come to her mind, her father wanting her to die instead of her mom and Alicia's mother attempting suicide in the car along with Alicia. So, her mind believes that there is literally nobody to care for her and due to that she chooses to eliminate such persons from her life. This unconscious thought drives her to shoot her husband to death.

This unconscious rush makes Alicia regret a lot and so she chooses to remain silent throughout her life. Theo Faber's life is filled with a traumatising childhood. None of his parents are good to him. He longs for love, care and affection. He gets all these things from his wife. But when he comes to know about his wife's affair with another person, he cannot tolerate that. Being a psychologist, he can talk to his wife and bring it to an end. But he does not do that. He does not want a bad ending in his life. He does not want to take the risk of losing his wife. So, he begins to follow Gabriel (his wife's new boyfriend) and finds his family. He makes Gabriel's wife to kill Gabriel. Due to his childhood trauma, he is not ready to face his wife or lose her, even though his wife is in the wrong. He also does not want his wife to do that mistake again. So, he plans to eliminate his wife's affair from her life. So, at the end, he manipulates Alicia to kill Gabriel, so that he, Theo, would live a happy life (Alex).

So, in this way, the subconscious mind shapes the future, either in good or in a bad way. Alicia's own subconscious trauma makes her kill her husband, Gabriel. Theo's own traumatising experiences make him do anything to save his own life.

Psychoanalysis by Sigmund Freud digs deep into the psychology of a person and analyses the mindset of a person in every possible aspect. The Ethics of Care is a very possible aspect. The Ethics of Care is a much-needed thing in the present society. Monetary pleasure is just a materialistic thing. But Ethics of Care is required for a person to lead a happy and satisfactory life (Gilligan). People tend to

analyse the mindset and characteristic features of the characters in the novel. But this should be analysed through the basic humanitarian principle. The Ethics of Care is the most important thing that an individual needs in his life. If such care is denied the consequences are drastic.

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