



RESEARCH PAPER

Traumas leading to Dilemmas: A Feminine Psychological Analysis of Alex Michaelides' *The Silent Patient*

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ABSTRACT

The study is a complex examination of marital conflicts in Alex Michaelides' *The Silent Patient* (2019), based on Karen Horney's theory of Feminine Psychology as the framework guide. The psychological traumas of Alicia Berenson, the novel's female protagonist, are central in decoding the intricacies of her broken marriage. A qualitative method and descriptive approach has been adopted to analyze the traumatic occurrences that cause the breakdown of the marriage and the resulting consequences. Through close reading of the narrative with reference to Horney's theory that counters classical Freudian views on women's psychology, the study enlightens on the deep impacts of gender stereotypes and objectification in society. The study investigates how Alicia Berenson adapts to the outcome of her failed marriage, gaining insight into her personal journey of rebuilding and resilience. Female psyche, marriage dynamics, and societal influences on women's roles in relationships can be better understood through such researches.

KEYWORDS Trauma, Dilemma, Feminine Psychology, Self-Discovery, Resilience

Introduction

Alex Michaelides' *The Silent Patient* (2019), a specimen of popular psychological thriller, has grasped the attention of scholars and researchers ever since its time of publication. Michaelides (1977-) in fact experienced a lot of problems in his childhood when there was a conflict going on between the Greek and the Turkish societies. He states that the conflict had affected his childhood, as he developed mental health issues and had to migrate because of this war. As a result, he felt constantly scared and concerned about his family members. As a patient, he took a lot of therapies for an extended period, which aroused a desire in him to study psychotherapy. He studied both kinds of therapy: namely individual therapy and group therapy. He graduated in English literature from the University of Cambridge. He studied psychotherapy for three years and spent almost two years at a secure unit working for young adults. This work provided information and motivation for his bestselling work *The Silent Patient*. Michaelides defined himself as a loving person, sensitive, a little shy and possibly a little irrational. In his view, psychology is an enormous phase of his life. Michaelides' name comes under the *New York Times* bestselling authors, because of his debut novel *The Silent Patient*, published for the very first time on the *NYT* bestseller hardcover fiction books. In explaining the storyline of *The Silent Patient*, Michaelides says that the novel is based on a psychological detective story on trauma and rational thoughts, the state of being sacrificed by others, and his own abusive childhood experiences. The author believes that the latter findings are connected with readers, which relatively shows the novel's commercial success. As for the setting, he thinks

of showing a bounded area, as well as an iconic location. To achieve this, he makes sure that the location of *The Silent Patient* should be set in a psychiatric unit.

In *The Silent Patient*, Michaelides introduces a compelling female protagonist whose psychological condition disrupts her marriage. Drawing on the intricate and often elusive nature of female psychology, he weaves a narrative filled with both passion and suspicion, delivering a gripping story full of unexpected twists. The novel juxtaposes domestic bliss with a deeper, unsettling reality, gradually revealing hidden truths. Through his storytelling, the author seeks to explore and justify the roles, responsibilities, and societal expectations placed on his female protagonist.

Throughout history, women have been considered inherently flawed. Their presumed flaws were deeply engrained in the assumption that they were sexually inadequate. The common belief was that it was not out of ambition that women wanted to outdo men, rather it was because of an unconscious envy rooted in their supposed deficiency, which Freud very legendarily labelled as “penis envy” (Kali, 2008, p. 28). The assumption, making up a keystone of Freud’s psychoanalysis, played a key role in shaping how female identity and desire are perceived and viewed, very often shrinking all complexities of female psyche to one emblematic nonpresence.

Hence, Freud argued that penis envy actually denoted an essential sexual deficiency in women which formed the basis of all their emotional responses and behaviours. The realization, that they can never be men, causes deep-rooted emotional turmoil and anxiety in women and leads to the resentment of the privileges enjoyed by men. According to Freud, the envy starts developing in the girl in early childhood upon the discernment of the physical difference between herself and her brother. Through one hundred and fifty years, the idea remained so engrained in cultural norms that women went on silently enduring without any critique. Nevertheless, in the first half of the twentieth century, Freud’s theory was being questioned by the leading female psychologists of the times. They contended that Freud was only a product of his time, and his assumptions just reflected his own cultural background instead of being some kind of universal truth. The rigid patriarchal societal structures of the Victorian age—where women were tightly confined, silenced, marginalized and considered the ‘Other’—were used as a point of reference by those female critics.

Women’s Psychoanalyst Karen Horney (1885–1952) was a German-born American. She completed her medical degree in 1911 from the University of Berlin. Horney got curious about the field of psychoanalysis and worked under the supervision of Karl Abraham. She is considered a Neo-Freudian because her theory of feminine psychology confronts some traditional Freudian views. She thinks that Freud’s theory is inaccurate and demeaning to women. Her theory came as a response to Freud’s theory of penis envy. While Horney agrees with much of Freud’s work, she rejects his views on female psychology. Her arguments in theory were about the inherent differences in the psychology of both genders.

Horney’s contribution was significant in establishing that sexuality was not necessarily the root cause of neurosis like conditions in women as was previously supposed; rather environmental influences were the shaping factors. According to her argument, neurosis, a common human condition, was experienced in some degree by everyone as part of the struggle to live a meaningful life; and a neurotic corner was there within all individuals. This turns into a diagnosable disorder only when a person’s ability to cope gets overwhelmed by external pressures. Freud’s theory of ‘penis envy’ was also defied by Horney; she proposed the alternative notion of ‘womb envy’. Her suggestion was

that since men are unable to create life, an ability naturally inherent in women, they can also experience feeling of lack. Such sense of inadequacy can be the driving force compelling men to counterbalance through endeavours at being successful and productive in other spheres.

Hence, as a field of study the focus of feminine psychology is specific psychological issues and experiences of women. Women's individual humanity and the societal challenges faced by them are examined here. Feminine psychology criticizes the gender-based biases present in conventional psychological theories, introducing the updated frameworks to defy and review the outdated perceptions. Within such context, the role of studies on neurosis and hysteria has been particularly significant.

Literature Review

Mohammad Afzal Hossain records that in the novel *The Silent Patient*, the stillness of Alicia is not prompted by any mental illness but rather out of recognition of the twofold repetition of the unchanged succession of treason and not being cherished. Alicia has experienced an indistinguishable pattern of betrayal and butchery at least two times within her thirty-three years of life. She noticed that her husband Gabriel had killed her like her father did when Gabriel picked out Alicia to die in his place. "I don't want to die, he said," when Theo asked Gabriel to choose between Gabriel himself and Alicia to die (Michaelides, 2019, p. 280). Gabriel not only lets down Alicia throughout his affair with Kathy, the wife of Theo, but he also sentences her to death as her father did. Gabriel hurt her even more than Alicia's father did; he sentenced her to death psychologically and psychically. Alicia's mother died in a car crash, but Alicia survived. Then, her father desired her to die in place of her mother. The nature and dimension of betrayal and psychic murder from her father and husband may differ in some aspects, but the implications and nature are the same. In both cases, Alicia's suppression has been crushed and ruptured. The containers, father and spouse, failed to contain her as they were expected to do. The holding atmosphere around her bowed, and so did her internal world. This familiarity and comprehension, for a brilliant painter like her, makes Alicia silent, knowing that she cannot be loved, cared and saved by anyone. There is nothing left in her life to struggle for, to say, rather than to keep silent. In adolescence, Alicia does not let her, at least subconsciously, grow a strong symbiotic relationship with the container with her partner Gabriel (Hossain, 2021, p. 322).

Kypc noted that psychological thriller texts have gained so much popularity in an era where many people encounter cerebral health challenges. The novel *The Silent Patient* by

Michaelidis is the best model of the genre mentioned above. This tale pivots on the affiliation between a psychiatric therapist and a mentally distressed patient who stayed silent after the death of her husband. This novel has drama, action and plot twists, and it also promotes two unpredictable storytellers and their insights, beliefs and efforts to take hold of the truth. Far from being a consoling text to read, the novel inspects the gloomy sides of the individual's psyche.

One of the two novel's narrators is Theo Faber, a forensic consultant who studies psychology "to heal, get well and fix himself" as his history carried on to bother him. One cannot but agree with

Theo, who strappingly believes that "we're shaped and completed by our parents", signifying that much of us is formed by our childhood, torments and abuses that we have faced. Theo shares painful memories of his affiliation with his father with the readers.

When Theo learns that his angst originated, he also admits that there were some joyful events in his childhood, generally when his father was not home. The narrator notifies the reader that he “grew up feeling edgy, afraid, anxious” and never felt protected around his father. The latter would frequently have rages, which caused the house to shudder. The result was “a childhood and adolescence dominated by hysteria and physical violence”. Theo expects high hopes of moving back and getting away. The novel’s other voice, overheard mostly through her diary entries, belongs to the title character, Alicia Berenson, who also has a disturbing past. Surprisingly, she is a painter who shoots her husband five times in his head. She completes a painting called *Alcesta* when her house is under arrest and then does not say a word. Alicia’s motives and the stillness that follows them are right at the centre of the novel. As the novel progresses, the the reader learns that

Alicia’s childhood was as detrimental as Theo’s. The reader observes that, at some point, they both had identical childhoods and identical fathers. After the car accident in which Alicia’s mother lost her life, she heard her father saying something that had a shocking effect on her life that, in a way, killed her. Her father wished that she would have died in place of her mother. The father’s mean words seriously harmed her psyche, which exercised itself in Alicia’s married life when she was an adult. However, some things are not easily left behind - “one day all the hurt and anger would burst forth.” They do in Alicia’s case, and the reader notices how the feelings buried deep down come forward and erupt into aggression, which has its roots in Alicia’s childhood suffering. *The Silent Patient* shows how recollections from the past can disturb us and how we can become psychologically unstable because of some traumatic experience resulting from our parents’ actions. The implications of the novel are far from being a comfort blanket. Indeed, the novel raises further consciousness regarding mental health and the problems that enfold it, viewing that parents’ deadly words and events can harm the mentality of their children in the future (Kypc, 2020, p. 87).

In the views of Ayesha Ashraf, Saba Zaidi, and Asim Aqeel, *The Silent Patient* by Alex Michaelides represents a postmodern cynicism which includes intertextuality, unusual characters and psychological issues of the modern age along with the so-called metanarratives or grand narratives, in connection with the standard fiction. The novel’s characters seek new epistemologies that grant their lives a different meaning because they believe in mini-narratives. According to Lyotard, because of language games/moves, societal communication takes place, which is known to us as metanarratives. Conversely, Lyotard’s mini-narratives concept focuses on respecting language differences and their games. The thorough content study of the novel highlights the occurrence of mini-narratives as a postmodern response to metanarratives; the novel also depicts intertextuality, another feature of postmodernism, in exhibiting pluralism, multiple meanings and subjective explanation. It refers to the tragedy of *Alcestis*, Greek mythology, as a symbolic reconsideration. *Alcestis* is a loving wife who sacrificed her life to save her husband’s. Due to this tragedy, she went into complete silence. This intertextual reference adds a further literary dimension to the novel’s story, which is why *The Silent Patient* is differentiated from other texts related to psychology. Alicia’s painting is related to her husband’s death, also entitled “*Alcestis*”, which is interpreted by her psychotherapist Theo Faber and forensic professionals to know more about her life by drawing parallels to the Greek tragedy despite her constant state of silence. The novel also questions the metanarrative of spoken/verbal talk by depicting silence as a communication tool, making it a major ally of language in the therapeutic session. The novel says, “Alicia remained silent – but she made one statement – a painting. The painting was a self-portrait. She titled it in the bottom left-hand corner of the canvas in light blue Greek lettering. One word: *Alcestis*” (12). At the same time, Theo surveyed the art gallery to observe all the paintings

related to her and to decode the references in her art. For instance, her last painting before the murder of her husband, "Alcestis", discloses her cause to stay silent after his husband's death. Throughout intertextuality, the novel's author,

Michaelides, merges his psychological thriller with Greek mythology while investigating current issues, including psychology, mistreatment, and faulty professional and funding policies related to psychological health units. Another intertextual connection is the constant reference to

Alicia's diary, which gives the plot more suspense and thrill. Her diary also mentions the play "Alcestis", which Alicia and her friend Jean-Felix watch together as a goodbye symbol. Alicia feels quite relatable to the protagonist of the play, who has also experienced a similar injustice. Alicia, at times, behaves like she cannot speak, but she is very well aware of how to convey her anger and internal thoughts with the help of her paintings and silence later on. Alicia stays silent in therapy sessions, which seems challenging to Theo. Therefore, he tries to come up with an effective plan. Because of her constant silence, Theo gives her a chance to paint: "Alicia had painted a redbrick building, a hospital – unmistakably the Grove. It was on fire, burning to the ground. Two figures were discernible on the fire escape. A man and a woman escaping the fire" (Michaelides, 2019, p. 163). The woman she painted was her, and the man signalled towards Theo. Thus, intertextuality connects the novel with other texts, and the mini arrive of multiple stories splits the themes of the text by depicting the sociological as well as the psychological effects of bullying, childhood trauma, parenting, depression, marital conflicts, mental anxiety and social pressures in the character's life. Likewise, unconventional characters portray favourable and unfavourable personality characteristics and cannot be put in the specific categories related to hero/heroine or villain (Ashraf et al., 2020, p. 449).

In conclusion, *The Girl on the Train* serves as a compelling narrative that encourages readers to reflect on the intricacies of human relationships and the societal forces that shape them. On the other hand *The Silent Patient* provides a deep exploration of the novel's themes and characters. It highlights how the stillness of Alicia is not merely a result of mental illness but rather a response to a lifetime of betrayal and emotional trauma, echoing the patterns of her past. The novel delves into the complexities of childhood trauma, suppressed emotions, and the consequences of unspoken words and actions. It also emphasizes the importance of understanding and addressing the psychological impact of past experiences on an individual's present behavior.

Theoretical Framework

It is claimed that Horney's personality was more into Freud than Freud himself was. While attributing numerous conceivable explanations for this, such as suggestions constructed on power factors, internal clashes, and much more, it is necessary to keep in mind that Horney's views were created by her own historical and social context, and she must be seen through it. At the beginning of her career, she was a member of the Freudian world and supported his views. Although that support abruptly ended when Horney published her work *The Neurotic Personality of Our Time*, Freud's association and the impact were still apparent in her writings on feminine psychology. In Horney's theoretical arguments, she employed social and cultural considerations and conceptualized the numerous signs that her female patients showed, which included penis envy and castration anxiety. Her metanarrative results unlocked new ways of looking at feminism in psychoanalysis. The patriarchal attitude, which was dominant in early psychoanalysis, was its focus. It was to pathologize those notions that did not follow Freud's theory, which was undoubtedly the dominant one. Many essentialists blamed Horney for not resolving penis

envy. However, Horney inquired about imperative questions such as why there are fewer successful marriages. Marriages that do not let partners grow happily, marriages in which stress and tension take the place of happiness and contentment, or in which partners feel guilty about choosing someone incompatible. Could it all be because of the institution of marriage, which cannot be settled with the realities and flaws of human survival? Is marriage perhaps only a delusion that disappears after some time, or is contemporary man predominantly incapable of providing marriage with the substance it needs? Are we accepting that it is the marriage's fault, or is it our fault when we condemn marriage? Why a failed marriage is considered the death of love? Is it necessary to surrender to this state as if it is an obligatory law, or are we subject to forcing this state, subject in content and impact, and possibly detectable and preventable, yet playing with human beings' feelings? In this important paper, Horney highlights the need for an inner refusal of claims on the partner, claims in the sense of demands and not desires. Many feminist psychologists believe that modern feminism emerged when Simone de Beauvoir, in 1949, published her book, *The Second Sex*, which was translated into the English language for the first time in 1953. However, it was Karen Horney's work that allowed de Beauvoir to ascend criticism of some theorists like Sigmund Freud. Horney is considered the modern feminist movement's mother.

Results and Discussion

Karen Horney, a pioneering psychoanalyst, offered fresh insights into the complexities of human relationships, including marriage. In *The Silent Patient*, her theories could illuminate the character's behaviors, such as Alicia's silence, through the lens of psychological issues. Horney's concepts provide a thought-provoking perspective to delve into the psychological underpinnings of the characters' actions within their marriages.

Sense of fulfillment. According to Karen Horney's perspective, it is crucial to consider that choices made in a voluntary marriage may not necessarily be entirely wrong. There could be qualities in a partner that genuinely align with one's expectations. In essence, marriage might involve recognizing the void within one's partner and then endeavoring to fill it. However, if the remainder of one's own self remains distant and shares little common ground with the partner, this sense of unfamiliarity can certainly jeopardize the sustainability of the relationship. Alicia Berenson, the central character in *The Silent Patient*, initially believed that she had found completeness within herself after marrying Gabriel, her husband. Something about her partner brought her a sense of vitality and met her expectations. She loved him to the extent that she was willing to go to great lengths for him. When Gabriel presented Alicia with a diary in which she could record her daily experiences, activities, or anything that contributed to her feelings of melancholy, it was an act of profound connection and intimacy in their relationship.

Alicia loved Gabriel more than anything but she does not feel complete with him. She scold herself whenever any thought of running away from him comes to her mind. Writing was a flow for her. She penned down her feelings on a diary but she suddenly stopped writing stuff that was personal because she feared that Gabriel might read it sometime and it would become a reason behind their fight and it can be clearly observed that Alicia did not want to fight ever in order to maintain her relationship. "All the writings in this diary are going to be according to joyful mood of mine to record ideas and images that inspired myself artistically and stuff which made creative impact on my mind. I will only write positive, happy and normal thoughts. No crazy thoughts are allowed to be written ever" (Michaelides, 2019, p. 3). Alicia was so happy after marrying Gabriel because she feels complete and satisfied. On her birthday, Gabriel took her to a picnic on the heath for breakfast. It was so beautiful spending time with Gabriel on the cool breeze that was

coming off the water and the air smelled of cut grass. They drank champagne and ate small tomatoes which were sweet in taste and along with that they ate smoked salmon and silvers of bread. Alicia desired to stay in that moment forever as she painted her husband when he fell asleep. On the same day, Gabriel asked Alicia that he want us to have a baby (Michaelides, 2019,

p. 133). After hearing this, Alicia felt some kind of a joy that she never felt but being in a relationship with Gabriel made her hopeful and lovely. I want to remember this day for the rest of my life. Every single second of it. I feel joyous. I feel full of hope (Michaelides, 2019, p. 136).

Childhood trauma. Some experiences may suffice to show that certain attitudes toward the opposite sex may have been acquired in childhood and feelings related to these experiences may be unconscious and their sources always remain unconscious (Michaelides, 2019, p. 127). Alicia Berenson was suffering a childhood trauma that led destruction toward her married life. She never imagined that her happily married life would shattered in a second. Alicia's childhood trauma was unconsciously rooting in her mind unless one day the rage and anger that she was holding onto, broke and reaction against all the anxiety made her fall into a complete silence. When Theo, her psychiatrist was trying to find out the reason behind Alicia's revengeful behavior he concluded that: "rage, like fear is a responsive rooted in nature. Something bad must happened in Alicia's childhood that provoked murderous impulses in her, which were emerged after all those abusive years" (Michaelides, 2019, p. 142).

No one is born evil. A baby cannot hate her mother, without the mother first hating the baby.

Babies are like the soft sponges and blank states. Living to presents most basic needs which include eating, shitting, being loved by parents and all. But sometimes things goes wrong depending on the circumstances and houses in which babies are born. A tormented, abused child can never take revenge in reality, as she is powerless and defenseless, but she can- and must- harbor vengeful fantasies in her imagination. That vengeful imaginations might be the reason for Alicia to kill her husband, Gabriel, whom she loved unconditionally. The psychological wound are caused by emotional disturbances and they became evident as time passes by. Imagine this situation when you hear from your father, the very person you depend on for your survival, desire you to be dead in place of her wife. How terrifying and traumatizing this must be for a child. Your sense of self-worth will collapse and at the same time the pain enlarge, too huge to be felt, so you would gulp it in order to bury it. As your life proceed, you would lose contact with the roots of your mental suffering, disconnect with the origins of its cause, and forget. But one day, all the anger and hurt would come forth just like how fire burst from a dragon's belly and you'd carry a gun. You would visit that rage that was caused by your father but not upon on him, because he is gone, disremembered and beyond your reach- but upon your husband, the man who came into your life, who prioritized you and made love with you. Therefore, you would shoot in his head for the five times; without even knowing the reason behind it (Michaelides, 2019, p. 272).

After marrying Gabriel, Alicia thought that all her childhood abuse will vanish and she will live happily ever after and she did. She was living in a beautiful house in London. Everybody liked her and she was very well-known because of her paintings. Her husband loved her in every possible way. "Gabriel can read me like a book" (Michaelides, 2019, p. 133). When Alicia felt love for the very fist time in her life, she forgot about her humiliation and abuse she struggled in her childhood. But something cannot be properly forgotten they

will come on forward as soon as the childhood humiliation they face again in their adult life. Alicia wished to say that she struck a blow for the one being defeated. I was standing there betrayed and broken-hearted. I can see it now. I would never be in safe hands. Never be loved. All my expectations, faded- all my dreams, crushed- leaving nothing behind, nothing my father was right- I did not deserve to live. I was- nothing. That is what my husband did to me. That is the reality. I have not kill Gabriel. He killed me. All I did was to pull the trigger (Michaelides, 2019, p. 326).

Lack of trust. In the views of Karen Horney, women are taught and seen as an individual, who is dependent on men, and they should look upon themselves in relation to their husbands, which in turn give birth to a diversity of psychological problems such as uneasiness, lack of self-esteem, and feelings of powerlessness. Following psychological problems can lead to the failure of relationships, as women may struggle to assert themselves and discuss their needs with their spouses. In *The Silent Patient*, the lack of trust between Alicia Berenson and her husband

Gabriel's relationship is a pivotal factor towards the failure of their marriage. Their marriage was being troubled with underlying tension and distrust despite having a loving relationship in the beginning of novel.

Alicia Berenson in the text demonstrates many of the qualities and behaviors that Karen Horney has described. Her character is depicted as submissive and reliant at the beginning of the novel, she depends on her husband to provide her emotional stability and safety. This reliance makes her defenseless towards the feelings of disloyalty and rejection when he cheats on her, which comes up with the feeling of suspicion and mistrust towards her husband. Moreover, her decision to stay silent and refusal to communicate with anybody shows that she was dealing with the feelings of anxiety and dependency, which made it challenging for her to assert herself and to talk about her needs with her husband. One reason that led reader to believe towards the lack of trust in their relationship is Gabriel's infidelity. When Alicia realizes that her husband is cheating on her with another woman, she went into a complete shock, and because of this shock, she started to feel deceived and shattered. She felt that her husband was using her and lying to her the whole time for his own purpose along with that he broke marriage vows between them, leaving no love and respect.

Alicia's trust was deeply shaken when she discovered Gabriel's affair. She questioned how he could betray her trust, and his response was apologetic, explaining it was an unintended mistake. Alicia then expressed her doubt about his future actions, and although Gabriel promised to regain her trust, Alicia's hope had faded, as evident in her uncertain reply. Along with that, Horney has attributed some negative traits related to the patriarchal society, which Gabriel's character completely represents in the novel, including self-admiration and a lack of empathy. Gabriel sees Alicia mainly as an object or accessory rather than as a fully-grown individual who has her own life and needs. His willingness to use his wife for his own artistic purposes and his dismissive behavior towards her needs and concerns proves his attitude and thoughts related to considering Alicia as an object. This feeling of anxiety and helplessness after knowing the truth of Gabriel shattered her to the core and turned their communicative and trusty relationship into a broken and destructive one.

In *The Silent Patient* by Alex Michaelides, another reason for the failure of marriage of Alicia Berenson and Gabriel could be the power struggle dynamic that eventually ended their relationship unknowingly. This power struggle, through Horney's theory of feminine psychology, can be demonstrated as an indicator of deep-seated anxieties and neuroses

that both Alicia and Gabriel struggled. According to Karen Horney, women are thought to be dependent and helpless, which eventually led them to feel insecure and dependent. This insecurity can be displayed in several means, which include the need for being accepted attached with a fear of rejection. On the other hand, men are socialized to be dominant and competitive, which lead them to feel aggression and a desire to control everyone with power. In the case of Alicia and Gabriel, it can be argued that both of them were struggling with these deeply ingrained gender expectations. Alicia, an artist herself, had been socialized to be obedient and subservient to her husband. Yet she also had a profound need for affirmation and approval from Gabriel, who was a successful photographer "He used to tell me I was his muse. But it was something else. He wanted to dominate me. I couldn't have my thoughts, my existence.". He was constantly belittling me, instructing me. I felt I was drowning" (Michaelides, 2019, p. 144). Alicia explains in this conversation how Gabriel's need to control the relationship.

She was suffocated and empowered, which added to the failure of their marriage. "You know what you are? A narcissist. You need to be in control all the time. It is always about you, your work, your success" (Michaelides, 2019, p. 149). In this exchange, Alicia accuses Gabriel of his requirement of control and self-centeredness. She sees his actions as narcissistic, which worsens the power struggle between them. She was intimidated by his achievement and needed to establish herself as an artist, which caused friction between them.

As for Gabriel, he was socialized to dominate and to be competitive, thus his need for power and control in his relationship with Alicia. "You think you are so independent, but you are not. You cannot even function without me. You need me to take care of you, to make decisions for you." (Michaelides, 2019, p. 155). In this conversation, Gabriel establishes dominance over Alicia by demeaning her autonomy and implying that she cannot make decisions for herself. This form of manipulation also supports the power struggle dynamic in their marriage. Overall, these conversation excerpts demonstrate the power struggle between Alicia and Gabriel within their marriage. Both partners crave control, but their strategies are inherently incompatible and ultimately contribute to the demise of their relationship. He envied her creativity and was threatened by her autonomy. He was also a closeted cheater, which further dismantled Alicia's trust in him. In general, the struggle for power in

Alicia and Gabriel's union may be interpreted as an expression of the neuroses and anxieties that each of the partners had developed due to their socialization and gender roles. In Karen Horney's view, not being able to transcend these anxieties and having a more equal and balanced relationship caused their marriage to collapse.

In the suspenseful mystery novel *The Silent Patient*, the life of Alicia Berenson is catapulted into a world of deep trauma and silence. Alicia, a renowned artist, becomes the focus of a chilling murder trial when she suddenly shoots her husband and then decides to stay silent. Her fall into silence, leaving behind a victim of such a horrific act, is the haunting backdrop for a psychologically complex story. This initial foray into Alicia Berenson's extraordinary survival and transformation journey explores her battle with her traumatic history. Gleaning insight from Karen Horney's theory of feminine psychology and Simone de Beauvoir's existential philosophy, readers are taken on a journey through a narrative that discloses Alicia's strength and her drive for personal redemption despite unimaginable tragedy. Her tale is a testament to the irrepressible human spirit's ability to overcome silence and find meaning and healing in the most difficult situations.

Self-expression and authenticity (Existentialist Perspective). Alicia's choice to express her trauma in her artwork is a major positive aspect. In an existentialist framework, this can be interpreted as her seeking authenticity. She does not let her trauma silence her and expresses her most intimate feelings and experiences in the form of paintings. This aligns with existentialist principles stressing the need for authentic self-expression. Alicia's survival of the traumatic experiences in her life is a testament to her strength. In an existentialist context, life tends to be defined by absurdity and problems. Alicia's survival and search for meaning despite extreme tragedy is consistent with existentialist principles that propose that people can derive meaning from their own choice and response to adversity. The underlying narrative of the book is Alicia's search for truth. Her insistence on understanding the circumstances of her trauma can be viewed as an existentialist search for meaning. She refuses to settle for a shallow or convenient explanation and instead explores the depths of her history, showing dedication to comprehending her own life.

Coping mechanism and catharsis (Theory of Horney). Based on Karen Horney's theory, people create different coping mechanisms to cope with their insecurities and traumas.

Alicia's employment of the arts as a means of catharsis and recovery is an example of a positive adaptation. Instead of resorting to self-destructive tendencies or pushing her feelings away, she directs her suffering into her art. This is a more constructive method of responding to trauma and is consonant with Horney's concept of moving toward self-realization. Alicia's silence as a defense mechanism at first appears to be a negative. But as the novel progresses, choosing to regain her voice and life control becomes a positive aspect of her character. She controls when and how she speaks, finally breaking free of her silence to speak out and take control of her own life, which aligns with Horney's focus on autonomy. Karen Horney's theory inspires people to break away from their victim roles and be in control of their lives. Alicia's behavior in the tale reflects her will to rise above the role of the silent victim. By being proactive in the process of healing and asking questions, she assumes power over her own story and becomes the master of her own life.

Karen Horney's feminist psychology can be used to study Alicia and Gabriel's marriage in *The Silent Patient*. Alicia was initially satisfied with her marriage, but her childhood trauma and lack of trust furthered its deterioration. Horney's concepts explain the behaviors of the characters and highlight the need to overcome past traumas and maintain equal dynamics in relationships. Rachel Watson and Alicia Berenson both experience deep survival and transformational processes after trauma. Rachel's life illustrates self-realization and breaking away from dependence, drawing on existentialist and Horney's theories. Alicia's experience is one of self-expression through art and coping strategies, showing resilience. Both characters embody how people can recover their lives and discover healing and purpose after trauma.

Conclusion

Alex Michaelides' *The Silent Patient* is a thrilling psychological thriller set within the mind of a woman who won't speak after she is accused of killing her husband. Narrated in the voice of her psychotherapist, Theo Faber, the novel is gripping as he becomes more and more fixated on getting to the bottom of his patient's history and cracking the code of her silent mind. The novel begins with Alicia Berenson, a prominent painter, having shot her husband, Gabriel, five times in the face and then refusing to ever utter another word. She is then admitted to a mental health facility, where she is the center of her therapist since he is sure that he can treat Alicia and is set to make her talk and share what actually happened on the night Gabriel was killed. As her therapist digs deeper into Alicia's history, he

uncovers a tapestry of deceptions, lies, and betrayals that could undo all he believed he knew about his patient.

He also discovers his own dark past and previous traumas, which complicate his professional and personal life. The novel is interspersed with alternating chapters, with Theo's current-day therapy sessions with Alicia on one side and Alicia's flashbacks to the events before and including the murder on the other. This format enables the reader to piece together the events that transpired leading up to Gabriel's death gradually, as well as discover the motive behind Alicia's silence. The underlying cause of feminine psychology in marital failure is traced to the societal and cultural expectations of women. The traditional gender roles demand that women place their role as a mother and wife above their personal wants and aspirations. Women are socialized to be submissive, caring, and self-denying, which can result in several psychological problems, including low self-esteem, anxiety, and depression. These cultural and societal demands may affect the way women perceive their marriages and relationships. Women might feel compelled to adhere to stereotypical gender roles, which might create a sense of lack of agency and autonomy in the relationship.

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