

# ***Hidden Diary*: Patriarchal domestic violence revealed in a revision of the maternal melodrama**

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## **Abstract**

*Lopes-Curval's 2009 maternal melodrama, Hidden Diary, represents patriarchal domestic violence as the cause of damaged mother–daughter relationships across three generations of a family, thereby revising the plot of the maternal melodrama. Once this violence is made visible, the women in the film empathise with one another and reconnect. Hidden Diary is unique in representing a wide range of controlling behaviours beyond the physical abuse that some men enact against their partners. The plot relies on feminist discourses of domestic violence as instrumental and socio-systemic. This article considers the film through theory about women's reading of film, the representation of women's culture, discourses of domestic violence, social learning theory, attachment theory and issues of single mothering. The author recommends using Hidden Diary in gender communication classes to discuss domestic violence and women's freedom, and in film studies classes to discuss authentic representations of women who have emerged from the patriarchy. More such films are needed.*

**Keywords:** domestic violence; feminist film theory; maternal melodrama; single motherhood

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## **Introduction**

This article examines Julie Lopes-Curval's 2009 film *Hidden Diary* (released in France as *Mères et filles*) to consider how it counters the traditional maternal melodrama by making patriarchal domestic violence visible. *Hidden Diary* breaks with the traditional woman's film by revealing domestic violence as the cause of a daughter's loss of her mother and a mother's loss of her daughter, or what Rich (1977, p. 225) describes as 'the essential female tragedy'. In the film, as 30-something Audrey considers progressing with an accidental pregnancy, she reflects upon relational problems between mothers and daughters in her family. Audrey wants to bond with her mother, understand why her grandmother left her children and construct a life free of patriarchal control. As Michelle and Weaver (2003, p. 238) note, 'the media largely neglect ... violence against women in the home, which most often occurs at the hands of men with whom women have close familial or personal relations'. *Hidden Diary* therefore fills an important representational void that demands close analysis. It is unique in representing many controlling behaviours (e.g. financial control) that some men enact against their partners and how those behaviours may damage family relationships. The film also represents how women's freedom has increased since the

1950s, but shows that power is still unequal between women and men. The author has found no previous research on this film.

Analysing representations of domestic violence and the choice to become a single mother is worthwhile, as such analyses may help more people develop deeper understanding of these issues and help media producers to develop more responsible content. In gender communication classes, *Hidden Diary* could be useful for discussing patriarchal ideology, women's freedom, what constitutes domestic violence, the effects of this violence on families and how to prevent the violence and help victims. The film could also be useful in considering alternatives to the traditional nuclear family, discussing advantages of and problems with single motherhood, and discussing structural ways to help women better cope with the demands of motherhood. In film studies, students could evaluate whether *Hidden Diary* provides a true representation of women's culture out from under the lens of patriarchal ideology.

Lopes-Curval reported that she produced the film to illustrate that lack of freedom was violent (Dumais, 2010). She also said, 'I was interested in tracing the process of change and freedom for women in the last 40 years or so', and suggested that the film represents a 'journey to [women's] self-awareness' (Shoji, 2010).

In *Hidden Diary*, the separation of Audrey's grandmother, Louise, from her children, young Martine and Gerard, follows the plot of a maternal melodrama:

Although there are many ... variants, the basic plot concerns a mother who is suspected of adultery and expelled from her home, thereby becoming separated from her children. She suffers degradation, sometimes becoming a drug addict or a prostitute. After a long ... separation, she again encounters her children who do not recognize her. (Jacobs, 2009, p. 123)

Examples of maternal melodramas are Vidor's (1937) *Stella Dallas*, Rich's (1966) *Madame X* and Lloyd's (1931) *East Lynne*. In these films, the heroine mother deliberately sacrifices connection to her children to bestow some perceived good on them or herself. The sacrifices are designed to make the heroines appear to be good mothers, which is perverse as the act of mothering constitutes nurturing connections with children. Williams (1984, p. 3) notes that it is typical of maternal melodramas to 'devalue' and 'debase' the 'actual figure of the mother while sanctifying the institution of motherhood' and suggests these films present a 'masochistic' (1984, p. 22) image of motherhood, which female viewers never fully supported.

After briefly describing *Hidden Diary*, this article first considers it through Williams' (1984) theory of how women read films and what constitutes an authentic representation of women's culture. Next, the article defines domestic violence and uses O'Neill's (1998) five discourses of domestic violence to describe its representation in the film. The article then uses social learning theory and attachment theory to discuss damaged relationships between Louise and young Martine, and Audrey and her mother. Finally, to consider Audrey's concerns about single motherhood, the article uses work by Juffer (2006).

## **Film background**

*Hidden Diary* revolves around two families, one which exists in present-day France (c. 2009) and consists of parents Martine (Catherine Deneuve) and Michel (Michel Duchaussoy), and their grown daughter, Audrey (Marina Hands). Martine, who is a 60-something physician, practises medicine out of her home in the community where she has always lived. Michel, an optometrist, is represented as a good husband and father who performs a fair share of domestic duties. The other family, living in the 1950s, is represented through Audrey's imagination. It consists of Audrey's grandparents, Louise (Marie-Josée Croze) and Gilles, and their children, young Martine and Gerard. Audrey, returned for a short visit from Canada where she is a professional whitegoods designer, begins imagining this family after finding Louise's diary fallen behind a cupboard in her grandparents' old seaside home. No one has touched the diary for 50 years. It contains money and a photograph of Louise and her children, the only known existing image of Louise.

According to the family, Louise suddenly disappeared when Martine was about eleven years of age. From that time, she and Gerard were raised by their father, Gilles, and no one has heard from Louise. As Audrey reads the diary, she becomes increasingly curious about Louise's life. Single and about eight weeks pregnant, Audrey wants to know why a mother would leave her children. To find out, Audrey questions Martine, but Martine verbally attacks Audrey in response. Martine wants to forget Louise, considering Louise selfish for abandoning her. When Martine first learns of the diary, she refuses to read it; however, after Audrey nearly miscarries, Martine finally looks at it. Upon absorbing its contents, Martine discloses what happened the night her mother disappeared. She realises that her father, Gilles, murdered Louise. Given knowledge of this violence, the women can heal their relationships and lovingly connect as mothers and daughters. Martine forgives Louise, Martine and Audrey begin to bond and Audrey proceeds with her pregnancy, choosing to become a single mother. The film ending hints that Audrey will raise her baby with the help of extended family and community. Key characters introduced throughout reveal aspects of Louise's, Martine's and Audrey's lives. Viewers meet Louise's old neighbour, Suzanne, who discusses women's place in the 1950s home; Tom, the father of Audrey's baby, who encourages Audrey with motherhood; and Audrey's friend, Samira, who represents a successful single mother.

## **Authentic representations of women that resist dominant male values**

Using the film *Stella Dallas* as a case study, Williams (1984) theorises about how women read women's films and whether women can be represented authentically in film as emerging from the patriarchy. Williams developed this theory by first critiquing feminist work on motherhood and female identity, then examining how female characters gaze at one another within films and, in turn, how female spectators gaze at these characters. Williams wanted to understand how the gaze of a woman towards another woman – particularly the gaze of mothers and daughters – differs from the erotic gaze of men towards women in film. This question is important, as women need films that allow them to see their true selves apart from the patriarchy, not more images

of what men desire women to be. Williams wanted to understand how to create films that would speak authentically to women.

When watching women's films, Williams (1984) theorised that female characters and spectators naturally take multiple perspectives on a situation, empathising with the experiences of different characters and personally judging what is acceptable treatment of heroines. According to Williams (1984, p. 8), 'This competence [in taking multiple perspectives] derives from the different way women take on their identities under patriarchy and is a direct result of the social fact of female mothering'. She said that feminists such as Chodorow (1978) saw female mothering as women's 'model of ... connectedness to all other relations in the world' (Williams, 1984, p. 8), and that connectedness constitutes the nature of women's culture. Therefore, for a women's film to be authentic, it must represent a culture of 'more nurturing and empathic relationship[s] similar to mothering', and 'resist the dominating values of the male colonizer' (1984, p. 10).

According to Williams, *Stella Dallas* violates women's culture, since its heroine, Stella, deliberately disconnects herself from her beloved daughter, Laurel. Stella breaks ties so that Laurel's future in upper class society will remain safe from association with her mother, who deems herself unacceptable because of her lower class. As *Stella Dallas* divides a mother and daughter, and does not intentionally reveal the patriarchal ideology within which the film operates, it does not speak authentically for women. In contrast, *Hidden Diary* speaks for women as it reconnects mothers and daughters and deliberately represents patriarchal control and its damaging effects. As discussed below, the film offers many opportunities for the women within it and female spectators to connect or empathise with different characters.

First, Louise's position as the object of Gilles' control may easily produce the empathy of her granddaughter, Audrey, and spectators. Gilles financially, emotionally, socially and physically controls Louise. Spectators may also empathise with Audrey regarding her confusion over an unplanned pregnancy and rejection by her mother, Martine. Martine, who should rightly deserve empathy due to the loss of her mother in childhood, may receive the least because she continually attacks Audrey. Only when Martine sees the truth of Louise's life can she become a woman with whom other women – including Audrey – can empathise. Once lost to one another, mothers and daughters in the film can reconnect because they have witnessed the damage inflicted on them under patriarchal violence. Given that *Hidden Diary* deliberately reveals domestic violence and concerns itself with connecting mothers and daughters, the film meets Williams' (1984) criteria for an authentic representation of women. The article now turns to the representation of domestic violence in film and in *Hidden Diary*, starting with a definition of this behaviour.

## **Defining and representing domestic violence**

The Australian Law Reform Commission and New South Wales Law Reform Commission (2010, p. 188) define domestic violence as follows: '[It is] an abuse of power perpetrated mainly (but not only) by men against women both in relationships and after separation. It occurs when one partner attempts physically or psychologically to dominate and

control the other.’ Domestic violence can include ‘emotional abuse, physical assault, sexual assault, verbal abuse, financial abuse, psychological abuse, isolating a woman from her friends and family, and stopping a woman from practicing her religion’ (White Ribbon Australia, 2017).

In *Hidden Diary*, the types of abuse committed by Gilles against Louise are financial, emotional, social and, in the end, physical. Gilles is highly controlling of Louise. According to Mouzos and Makkai (2004, p. 3), controlling behaviour is one of the three ‘strongest risk factors for current intimate partner physical violence’. The other two factors are drinking habits and a partner’s general aggression level. In *Hidden Diary*, Gilles does not drink; however, he does aggressively break something precious to Louise, a camera from the local photographer. Gilles completely controls the family finances and forbids Louise to work. Emotionally, he compares Louise with other women and controls her dress. Socially, he isolates her in the home, forbidding her to use public transport. Gilles’ domestic abuse detrimentally affects Louise, her children and even her granddaughter, Audrey. The harm that comes to young Martine through her father, and to Audrey through her mother, shows that the witnessing of domestic violence is a type of child abuse.

According to Laing (2008, p. 20), another type of domestic violence is for a perpetrator to purposely target a woman’s mothering to gain power and control:

Tactics can include a range of behaviours that undermine mothering and damage the mother–child relationship, such as contradicting the mother’s rules, rewarding children’s disrespectful behaviour towards her, denigrating her as a mother and in some cases, directly involving children in the abuse.

Gilles uses this type of violence: towards the end of *Hidden Diary*, he tells Louise that she is an incompetent mother. Also, an earlier scene in which young Martine acts disrespectfully towards Louise indicates that Gilles has deliberately damaged the mother–child relationship. In this scene, young Martine sees her mother sitting on the beach in a beautiful dress. Martine marches down to ask, ‘Is that Dad’s dress?’ When Louise says that it is, Martine attacks her, saying, ‘You don’t wear it to the beach. You don’t know anything.’ Louise slaps Martine, saying, ‘You don’t talk to your mother like that!’ Louise then takes her children out for an important talk, which will be discussed later. Like Stella in *Stella Dallas*, Louise is of lower social class than her husband. Both Gilles and Stella’s husband make their wives feel out of place in their own homes and disconnect them from their children.

As discussed earlier, particularly dangerous times for women who have violent partners are when they are actively separating or have already separated. In *Hidden Diary*, Gilles murders Louise when she is leaving. According to Mouzos and Rushforth (2003, p. 17), separated women are at a higher risk of being killed by their ex-partners than women who are still in their relationships. In a study of Australian homicide, Davies and Mouzos (2007) found that in 2005–06:

[T]he majority of female victims (58%) were killed as a result of a domestic altercation (which includes arguments based on jealousy, separation or termination of a relationship, infidelity, children and custody issues,

alcohol fuelled domestic altercations and other issues between intimate or past-intimate partners).

Given this information, many women would be safer having children on their own, which is what Audrey is deciding to do. This is not to say, however, that becoming a single mother is without problems. Advantages of and problems with single motherhood will be discussed later.

This section now reviews studies of the representation of domestic violence in film then discusses them in relation to *Hidden Diary*. Three studies are considered, by Shoos (2003), Wheeler (2009), and Michelle and Weaver (2003). These researchers argue that although all the films studied are commendable for bringing domestic violence to public attention, none represents the issue in ways that would truly help either victims or perpetrators. Shoos (2003) studies *What's Love Got to Do with It* (Brian Gibson, 1993), which concerns Tina Turner's violent relationship with her husband, Ike. Wheeler (2009) studies the representation of domestic violence in five 1990s English-language films, and Michelle and Weaver (2003) study three 1990s New Zealand documentaries on the topic.

Shoos (2003) commends *What's Love* for representing the fact that women do not necessarily become safe when they leave. In the film, as in life, Ike continued to threaten Tina after she left. Shoos (2003, p. 68) criticises the film as follows:

[It implies] that the ultimate solution to domestic violence – rather than to seek help or to make a plan to achieve safety – is to simply stand up to the abuser, a tactic that may put women at increased risk.

Shoos also criticises the film for making it the victim's sole responsibility to make a change rather than noting the place of institutional roles in assisting women or sometimes enabling domestic violence to continue. *Hidden Diary* also suffers from the problem that no one is available to help Louise, meaning that she must enact her own escape. Although she does make and follow a plan, her execution of it fails when the bank manager alerts Gilles that Louise has cleared their account. She had earlier convinced him to give her access. On the day she is leaving, she withdraws all their money – ostensibly to buy Gilles a car. Following the bank manager's call, Gilles arrives home early to catch and kill Louise.

In *Hidden Diary*, the mothers in each generation deliver their own advice to avoid domestic violence, but none is fully satisfactory. Louise in the 1950s advises young Martine to study and fulfil herself. Such study should make her financially free of a man and give her an interesting life. Louise delivers this advice to Martine following the beach incident described previously. Martine grows up to become a physician. Next, adult Martine, who raises Audrey in the 1970s and 1980s, tells her young daughter that technical progress has helped to liberate women. Partly due to these words, Audrey chooses the technical career of whitegoods designer. This career has made Audrey financially free and independent; however, Audrey sees that, despite such accomplishments, many women still experience domestic violence. She therefore sees single motherhood as a viable option to keep herself and others free from it. As discussed, though, in current society single motherhood is not typically an easy path

and does not suit everyone. The film provides no detailed messages about how to help current victims of domestic violence or make life easier for single mothers.

Taking a feminist critical perspective, Wheeler (2009) studies the representation of domestic violence in the films *Sleeping with the Enemy* (Joseph Ruben, 1990), *What's Love Got to Do with It?* (Brian Gibson, 1993), *Once Were Warriors* (Lee Tamahori, 1993), *Nil by Mouth* (Gary Oldman, 1997) and *Enough* (Michael Apted, 2002). Wheeler (2009, p. 172) sees these films and his research as opening 'a debate on how domestic violence has been, could be and should be represented in cinema'. He states that since each of these films was constructed with audience expectations and sales in mind, none was truly directed at solving the problem. It is argued here that *Hidden Diary* provides a more progressive representation of domestic violence than these earlier films because it represents a wider range of tactics and does not focus primarily on physical abuse. *Hidden Diary* was also made specifically for women and, as stated earlier, aims to reveal the patriarchal ideology behind abuse.

One theory that helps to explain key differences regarding how the media represent domestic violence is O'Neill's (1998) five discourses of domestic violence, which Michelle and Weaver (2003) use to analyse three New Zealand documentaries about such violence made between 1994 and 1997. O'Neill's (1998) five discourses are: domestic violence as medical pathology; Romantic inner tension; instrumental violence; a learned response; and socio-systemic norms. To uncover these discourses, O'Neill critically analyses social science literature about domestic violence to discover key terms, actions and behaviours. O'Neill (1998, pp. 458–9) states that, 'Each discourse has its own constructions, which are internally consistent, and implications for institutional practice that can be seen to be operating in the community'. O'Neill maintains that any or all discourses could be combined in any text.

Under the medical pathology discourse, domestic violence is constructed as deviant individual behaviour caused by an underlying psychological illness, for which a man cannot be held accountable and for which he needs treatment: 'The pathologies can be as diverse as biological anomalies, abnormal personality traits, faulty marital systems, abusive families of origin, and alcoholism' (O'Neill, 1998, p. 460). Under this discourse, wife abusers may have 'low self-esteem, an inability to express feelings, a fear of intimacy, an inability to trust in a relationship ... poor communication skills' (1998, p. 461) or other problems. Also, victims themselves may trigger a man's abuse by wanting abuse, having 'overbearing and controlling personalities' or provoking a man – perhaps by unduly stressing him (1998, p. 461). The medical pathology discourse also includes dysfunctional, or 'sick', marriages as the cause of abuse, as well as the passing down of violence through generations of a family, like a disease, and alcoholism.

Under the discourse of Romantic inner tension, domestic violence is said to result from a natural build-up of frustration and tension within a man due to external stressors or an innate predisposition, which releases as uncontrollable rage. O'Neill (1998) states that underlying this discourse are theories of the family, which argue that structural features of family life make conflicts more likely to occur than in other situations. In the family, members spend more time together than with outsiders, and members are likely

to get in one another's way, thereby causing stress. Further, because the conflicts are personal, they are likely to be stronger than conflicts occurring elsewhere. This discourse also says that violence happens more often and more strongly among lower socioeconomic groups because they have fewer abilities and resources to deal with the greater stresses caused by poverty and reduced life opportunities.

Next, under the discourse of instrumental violence, domestic violence is viewed as strategic behaviour that a man enacts to achieve goals, such as controlling his wife. Under this discourse, a person deliberately uses violence 'to resolve conflicts, to remove stressors, to get one's way, to assert dominance over others, and/or to enhance one's self-esteem or self-concept' (O'Neill, 1998, p. 466). Feminists see domestic violence as instrumental violence that is supported by the social and cultural system in which it occurs. Therefore, feminists draw on two perspectives when describing domestic violence, describing it as controlling acts that build and sustain a husband's dominance as well as keeping power uneven within marriage. Contextually, such violence occurs within 'patriarchal institutions, sexist norms, and [the] historical legacy of male dominance, which socializes men and supports, condones, and legitimates their violence toward women' (O'Neill, 1998, p. 468).

Next, the socio-systemic discourse says that violence derives from the social system, in which men are socialised generally to be violent and women are placed in a devalued position, which is more likely to incur men's abuse. Also, this discourse sees violence in western society as comparatively normal. As O'Neill noted, this discourse directly contradicts the discourse of medical pathology, which sees domestic violence as abnormal. According to socio-systemic discourse, social norms are more powerful influences on behaviour than individual personalities, so people in general have little choice but to be violent. According to this discourse, boys 'are socialized to be like soldiers: to objectify others, control their emotions, and intimidate their enemy' (1998, p. 472). Further, this discourse draws on the idea that men are unable to differentiate among their arousing feelings and may sense anger instead of what may be fear, insecurity or another emotion. Men are therefore more likely to become violent because they have incorrectly interpreted their emotional needs. Also, socialisation into sex roles may lead to violence, as partners conflict over role expectations. As feminists explain, men often believe that it is their 'right to dominate and control ... wives, and ... [therefore] their right to punish ... [wives] for not doing what the men think should be done' (1998, p. 473).

Lastly, the learned response discourse says that people learn to behave violently based on their socialisation. This discourse encompasses Bandura's (1971) social learning theory, which explains how people can acquire new behaviour patterns, including that of violence, by directly experiencing or observing the patterns. Bandura says that people are more likely to use violence to deal with conflict when no peaceful, non-provocative behaviours have been modelled for them. Violent people lack these possibilities in their repertoire of responses. Social learning theory also explains how violence is transmitted across generations of a family.

From their research on the New Zealand documentaries, Michelle and Weaver (2003, p. 290) argue that while all O'Neill's (1998) discourses appear, some are

privileged over others and thereby 'exonerate violent men'. The researchers argue that the documentaries consistently 'conflate and privilege ... the pathology, romantic expressive tension, and learning' discourses, which then 'displace and silence the more critical accounts offered by the ... instrumentalist and sociosystemic discourses' (2003, p. 290). Even though the documentaries are to be commended for bringing the problem of domestic violence to public attention and demonstrating that at least some violent men can change, the researchers argue that the use of individual cases, personal testimonies and survivor discourses allows them to exploit women's experience and not effectively confront systemic patriarchal violence. In contrast to these documentaries, this article argues that *Hidden Diary* confronts the system.

In *Hidden Diary*, the discourses of instrumental and socio-systemic discourse are brought to the fore to describe Gilles' behaviour towards Louise. As 1950s culture placed wives in the home, that is where Louise is placed and where Gilles wants her to stay. In one scene, Louise tells Gilles directly that she would like to work with him outside their home in his dress shop. She says, 'You know what I'd like, Gilles? To help at the shop, work behind the counter, receive the customers, choose the fabrics with you. Many couples run shops.' When he does not acknowledge her request, she says, 'I hear that in big cities, a woman doesn't always need her husband's permission to work.' Gilles and Louise could have worked together, but Gilles does not allow it.

As stated, Louise wants to do things outside the home, but such action does not fit cultural norms. Louise's old neighbour, Suzanne, well summarises how people at the time regarded women like Louise:

She had a camera. She had even decided she wanted to be an assistant to Mr Lebedel, the photographer. The fuss that caused [with her husband]! ... She spent a lot of time there [at the photographer's shop], but no one really knew [if they were having an affair]. But people talked. First it was photography, then English lessons ... Humph ... a woman like that is a real plague ... She went [to the English lessons] by bus. That wasn't done.

As the above statement indicates, Suzanne herself accepted patriarchal ideology by calling Louise a 'plague'. From Suzanne's perspective, it was even acceptable for Gilles to become violent with Louise over her lessons. Suzanne diminished this violence by labelling it a 'fuss'. From Suzanne's perspective and that of the patriarchy, a woman belongs at home. By going to the photographer's shop and riding the bus, Louise is unacceptably breaking cultural norms.

Gilles personally demonstrates instrumental violence against Louise throughout the film, since all his actions aim to make her comply with his goals. For example, regarding the English lessons, he says, 'I can't let you go to your lessons by bus ... I do [trust you], but my customers gossip ... I can't lose customers because of your ... lessons. I just can't.' When Louise disappears, the police do not even investigate. As a woman, the film represents Louise as so devalued that the local people do not even search for her. Given these factors, *Hidden Diary* clearly uses instrumental and socio-systemic discourses to portray domestic violence, and therefore differs from previous films.

## **Social learning theory and attachment theory as explanations for damaged mother–daughter relationships**

Both social learning theory and attachment theory provide helpful explanations for how Gilles' violence damages the relationships between Louise and young Martine, and adult Martine and Audrey. Social learning, as discussed previously, provides a pathway by which children learn violence from their caregivers. In *Hidden Diary*, Martine has apparently learned from her father how to think about and act towards her mother: with violence. In addition to the beach scene discussed earlier, adult Martine reveals towards the end of the film the shame she felt towards her mother. Martine is likely to have learned this feeling from her father. Martine describes how she was feeling about her mother on the day Gilles killed her, an act of which she was unaware at the time:

When Gerard and I got home from school, the door wasn't locked. There was no one home but the door was unlocked. It was Suzanne's son's birthday party but I didn't want us to go. I was ashamed my mother wasn't there. I felt so ashamed of her.

Louise writes in her diary that she wants her children to be proud of her, as other children are proud of their mothers. She writes that Martine sided with Gilles against her:

If only I could do something to make my children proud. I like to know, like those women whose books I read. They're intelligent and independent. My life is at home. I'm not even a good housewife ... Other women seem happy. They smile in any case ... My daughter is as reactionary as the others. She judges me and hates me. Me, too, I end up hating her. She defends her father against me.

Young Martine apparently comes to feel shame towards her mother through the role-modelling of her father. Through this shame, Martine develops a poor attachment to her mother, which is explained by Bowlby's attachment theory. This theory concerns people's need for closeness to 'affectionate, trusted and supportive' individuals to whom they can turn when they need protection and support (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016, p. 11). These individuals are special and not just important relationships. Bowlby originally conceived the theory to describe bonding between mothers and babies, but researchers have found that secure relationships are important across the lifespan. Although this theory has received criticism, which will be discussed later, 'there are indeed conditions that produce unsuccessfully attached children – such as a chaotic environment, persistent violence and aggression around or toward a child as in cases of abuse, or severe neglect' (Quinn & Mageo, 2013, p. 13). Even before Louise has disappeared, young Martine has become poorly attached to her mother. Gilles' violence first damages and then breaks the mother–child bond.

Within attachment theory, the concept of *attachment style* is most useful for explaining the relationship between Audrey and Martine in *Hidden Diary*. Ainsworth, who helped Bowlby to develop the theory, identified three attachment styles: secure, anxious-resistant or ambivalent, and avoidant (Ainsworth et al., 1978). A person with a

secure attachment to another feels safe, and can rely upon this sense to explore their world. Children develop the insecure attachment styles of anxious or avoidant when their care provider is unpredictable or rejecting. With the avoidant style, a child tries to reduce their attachment needs so they can avoid rejection while simultaneously staying close enough to the care provider to feel safe. With the ambivalent style, a child clings 'to the caregiver, often with excessive submissiveness' (Holmes, 2014, p. 64). According to Holmes, a person with the ambivalent style has mixed feelings towards their care provider. While such a person feels 'intense love, need and dependency', they also fear rejection and anger, and remain wary. 'A lack of security arouses a simultaneous wish to be close and the angry determination to punish the attachment figure for the minutest sign of abandonment' (2014, p. 53).

As stated earlier, attachment theory has attracted much criticism. Despite its wide use in psychology, many see it as a Western, non-universal theory of caregiver-child relationships (Quinn & Mageo, 2013). It is also criticised for the procedure it follows to assess the attachment of young children to their primary caregiver, which is the Strange Situation Procedure (SSP). In the SSP, children's behaviours are observed in a toy-filled experiment room as strangers and caregivers come and go. Their behaviours are compared with those expected of securely attached, middle-class American children, which are not universal. According to Quinn and Mageo (2013), since parenting practices differ among cultures, children's behaviour in the SSP should be interpreted based upon the context in which caregivers are raising the children, not according to a single culture's expectations. The SSP also evaluates a child's attachment to a single primary caregiver, while children raised in non-industrialised countries or within extended families may have multiple mothers. The SSP is therefore invalid for measuring attachment among such children. Nonetheless, as discussed, the theory has some validity.

In *Hidden Diary*, adult Martine depicts an ambivalent style while Audrey depicts an avoidant style. The scene in which these styles are most clearly represented is when Audrey reveals that she has found Louise's diary. Triggered by thoughts of Louise, Martine attacks Audrey:

I don't care. She left. It's not my problem now. Is that why you're at the house?  
To nose around ... You should look to the future. At this rate, you'll end up  
alone and that really upsets me ... You can spend your life looking back ...  
What will it get you?

Martine then asks Audrey whether she is still in therapy, to which Audrey replies, 'No', but says that she will return. Martine continues to attack and describes herself as unlovable:

To ... cry ... more about your wicked mother who preferred her patients to her  
daughter? You enjoy that? Wallowing in misery ... You're the one always  
looking for a fight! I can see you can't stand me ...

Martine's reaction to the discovery of the diary also indicates that she wishes to keep the circumstances of Louise's departure hidden. According to McCloskey (2013, p. 319):

The stigma of domestic violence ... may engender a compulsive secrecy  
and anxiety about falling under public scrutiny ... A traumatogenic

reaction ... might percolate through time, and through generations can disturb mother-daughter relationships. Stigma and trauma shrouded by family secrecy give rise to intense feelings of shame ... People who are 'shame-prone' may be more likely to suppress experiences that manufacture shame.

When Audrey reveals her frustration about communicating with Martine, Martine continues attacking, claiming that Audrey is a bad daughter because she moved away and abandoned her. In response, Audrey demonstrates her avoidant style, which is to keep her mother at a safe distance:

I'm going. I think it's for the best ... It wasn't easy moving so far away ... I took ... [the opportunity] and ... don't regret it. You didn't decide my life ... Your mother left because her life was killing her, not because of you. Guilt is just a human emotion. I don't consider you guilty. I feel guilty, too, but you've never given me any choice.

The trouble between Martine and Audrey has come to them through Gilles and patriarchal ideology.

### **Choosing to become a single mother**

Women can become single mothers through spousal death, divorce, separation or accidental pregnancy, or the deliberate choices of adoption, intercourse with a willing partner or donor insemination. In *Hidden Diary*, Audrey's pregnancy is represented as accidental. When the father of her baby, Tom, offers marriage, she declines as she wants to marry someone she loves:

Seriously, Tom. I imagine a more traditional scenario. You meet someone, you fall in love, you make plans, you live with him ... One day, you end up pregnant. You cry for joy. He brings you flowers and you stop asking yourself questions.

Tom replies that the man Audrey envisages may not show up soon enough for her to become a mother so she should proceed with this pregnancy. Tom says he will be available for her regardless of marriage and believes that becoming a mother will be good for her.

Audrey, however, feels that life may become too difficult for her if she must balance work, personal freedom and child rearing. She does not want to bring a child into the world that she would abandon as her grandmother apparently abandoned her own mother. As indicated by her statement above, her ideal child-raising scenario would be with the help of a loving partner. According to Juffer (2006, p. 228), most single mothers think like Audrey, citing a documentary produced for Oxygen Media in which:

most of the women ... [interviewed said they] wish they had been able to find a male partner with whom to have a child, and that they still hope to find one to help raise their child.

Although most women say that they would prefer to have a partner, single motherhood nonetheless holds advantages for many, which include freedom from male control and domestic violence, achieving joy through self-reliance, learning to 'maximize ... time and opportunities ... to make life better for ... [one's self and one's] children' (Juffer, 2006, p. 54), and being sexually free.

In the film, Audrey's friend Samira provides a role model of the successful single mother. Samira became a single mother when her partner left. The main advantage she expresses about motherhood is that she is not alone. When Audrey tells Samira that she is afraid of having children, Samira asks, 'Are you afraid of being alone later?' When Audrey responds that she has not thought of that, Samira says, 'I hadn't thought of it either. But after Paul went away, I realized that I had my daughters and they had me and that we were strong together.'

Audrey believes that single motherhood will lead to a loss of freedom. Her thoughts are based partly on a cultural value that in order to be a good mother, a woman must be completely self-sacrificing, and partly on the fact that much more support is needed for mothers in Western culture than is available. Juffer (2006) considers these issues. First, she argues that mothers who practise what Foucault (1997) calls 'care of the self' are better mothers than those who self-sacrifice, since if a woman is cared for, she can provide better care for others. As Juffer (2006) notes, however, caring for oneself as a single mother can be a problem because, after a day of professional and domestic duties, little energy is left for the self. This lack of energy takes us to Audrey's second concern: a lack of support to help women raise children. Juffer (2006) and many others argue that Western culture needs more structures to support mothers. For example, within couples, male partners could perform more domestic duties. Further, all governments could financially support mothers. McLanahan (2004) reports that in industrialised Western countries, households headed by single mothers have a much greater poverty rate than those headed by two parents. Childhood poverty can, of course, be reduced if mothers work, but work may only be possible if it is flexible and if affordable childcare available.

Other structures that Juffer (2006) considers for helping single mothers are workplaces that demonstrate the value of mothering; provision of on-site childcare, open 24 hours a day if needed; expense accounts that include childcare costs; the ability to work from home; no fear of reprisal if a woman uses available workplace leave; strong personal support networks; and the help of an extended family. As a single mother, Audrey could benefit from all these structures.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, *Hidden Diary* aims to authentically speak to women by revealing the damaging acts of patriarchal domestic control, thereby opening women's eyes to it and demonstrating that women have achieved greater freedom since the 1950s, but that more needs to be done. To improve lives for women and families, more films like *Hidden Diary*, which take a feminist perspective on this difficult problem and provide role models and ideas on how to create greater gender equality, are needed. The author recommends the use of this film in gender communication classes to discuss

domestic violence and single motherhood, and in film studies classes to discuss patriarchal ideology in film and women's reading of film.

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