



## The Effect of Parental Rejection on Children's Personality Depicted in *The Willoughbys* (2020)

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### **Abstract**

#### **Purpose**

*This current study aimed to analyze the effect of parental rejection on children in *The Willoughbys* (2020) movie. The focus of discussion in this study was centered on the first child of the Willoughbys family, namely Tim Willoughby.*

#### **Method**

*The method used to help analyze the data is a qualitative method. The data are taken from pictures and dialogues from the movies. Through the psychological approach, this study implemented Parental-Rejection Theory (PARTheory) to help analyze the effect of parental rejection presented in the movie.*

#### **Results/findings**

*The study showed that parental rejection affects children socially and emotionally. It influenced some aspects of children's life. Tim Willoughby suggested that parental rejection affected his perspective of the world, his dependency level, his relationship with others, and also his mental state.*

#### **Conclusion**

*The study concluded that the consequences of parental rejection contain features that can have the potential to last for a long time. Therefore, this study suggests that parents must take into consideration of their words as well as actions toward their children. They also have to pay close attention to their children's development so that they can intervene if children show any symptoms that indicate problems.*

#### **Keywords**

*children's literature, effect, movie, parental rejection, *The Willoughbys**

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### Abstrak

#### Tujuan

Studi ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis efek dari penolakan orang tua terhadap anak dalam film *The Willoughbys* (2020). Fokus diskusi dalam penelitian ini terpusat pada anak pertama dari keluarga *the Willoughby* yang bernama, *Tim Willoughby*.

#### Metode

Metode yang digunakan untuk membantu menganalisa data adalah metode kualitatif. Data-data yang digunakan berasal dari gambar dan dialog dari film. Melalui pendekatan psikoanalisis, penelitian ini mengimplementasikan teori *Parental Acceptance-Rejection (PARTheory)* untuk membantu menganalisa efek dari penolakan orang tua terhadap anak yang terdapat dalam film.

#### Hasil/temuan

Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa penolakan orang tua memengaruhi anak secara sosial dan emosional. Hal tersebut memengaruhi beberapa aspek dalam kehidupan anak. *Tim Willoughby* menggambarkan bahwa penolakan dari orang tua memengaruhi cara pandang dia terhadap dunia, tingkat ketergantungannya terhadap orang lain, hubungannya dengan orang lain, dan juga kondisi mentalnya.

#### Kesimpulan

Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa efek-efek dari penolakan orang tua terhadap anak mempunyai karakteristik yang berpotensi untuk bertahan dalam jangka waktu yang lama. Oleh karena itu, penelitian ini menyarankan supaya orang tua lebih memerhatikan ucapan dan juga perilaku mereka di depan anak. Mereka juga harus memerhatikan dengan sungguh-sungguh pertumbuhan anak mereka agar dapat mengintervensi apabila anak menunjukkan gejala-gejala yang mengindikasikan permasalahan.

#### Kata Kunci

literatur anak, efek, film, parental rejection, *The Willoughbys*

### المخلص

#### الهدف

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تحليل آثار رفض الوالدين على الأطفال في فيلم *The Willoughbys* (2020) وتركز المناقشة في هذه الدراسة على الطفل الأول لعائلة *the Willoughby* اسمه *Tim Willoughby*.

#### الطريقة

الطريقة المستخدمة للمساعدة في تحليل البيانات هي طريقة نوعية. أما البيانات المستخدمة فتأتي من الصور والحوار من الفيلم. ومن خلال نهج التحليل النفسي، تطبق هذه الدراسة نظرية قبول الوالدين – الرفض *Parental Acceptance-Rejection (PARTheory)* للمساعدة في تحليل آثار رفض الوالدين للأطفال في الأفلام.

#### النتيجة

أن رفض الوالدين يؤثر على الأطفال اجتماعياً وعاطفياً. هذا يؤثر على العديد من جوانب حياة الطفل. وصف *تيم ويلوبي* كيف أثر الرفض من والديه على نظرته للعالم، ومستوى اعتماده على الآخرين، وعلاقاته مع الآخرين، وحالته العقلية.

#### الخلاصة

خلصت هذه الدراسة إلى أن آثار رفض الوالدين على الأطفال لها خصائص من المحتمل أن تستمر على المدى الطويل. لذلك، تشير هذه الدراسة إلى أن الآباء يهتمون أكثر بكلامهم وسلوكهم أمام أطفالهم. كما يتعين عليهم أيضاً إيلاء اهتمام جاد لنمو طفلهم حتى يتمكنوا من التدخل إذا أظهر الطفل أعراضاً تشير إلى وجود مشكلة.

#### الكلمات الرئيسية

أدب الأطفال، المؤثرات، الأفلام، الرفض الأبوي، عائلة *ويلوغيبس*

## INTRODUCTION

Nelson Mandela once said, "Our children are our greatest treasure" (About South African History Online (SAHO), 2012). Many parents are willing to do anything for the happiness and future of their children. Thus, parents become an important part of their children's lives. It gets to the point that children's emotional and psychological states are very dependent on the quality of the relationship they have with their parents (Rohner, Khaleque, & Cournoyer, Introduction to parental acceptance-rejection theory, methods, evidence, and implications, 2012). However, in some cases, there are children who are rejected by their parents. Due to the great influence that they had, parental rejection was certainly not a trivial problem. In fact, the empirical study of parental acceptance-rejection has existed since the 1890s and continues to develop today (Stogdill, 1937; Ildiz & Ayhan, 2020; Epli, Batik, D., & Çelik, 2021; Rothenberg, et al., 2022).

*The Willoughbys* (2020) is an animation-comedy movie by Kris Pearn and Cory Evans. This movie is based on a book of the same title written by Lois Lowry published in 2008. In the movie, the narrator who is a blue cat tells the life of four neglected children: Tim, Jane, and twins whose names are both Barnaby. They are raised by their selfish and self-centered parents. Because of the bad treatments from their parents, they think that their life would be free and happier without them. Therefore, they create a sneaky plan to orphan themselves by sending their parents on a vacation with deadly destinations. Surprisingly, their parents fall for it and hire a cheap nanny to watch over the children.

Although *The Willoughbys* (2020) is intended for children, it has a relatively dark theme. In the beginning of the movie, the narrator gives a warning that the movie is not for those who look for a cliché story that ends with happily ever after. Thus, this movie is interesting to study because it raises a topic that is very different from most movies in the context of children's literature. In addition, children's literature is often underestimated by people because the topics are concerned with children thus considered inferior compared to others (Grenby, 2014; Fadiman, 2022). Certainly, almost all children's literature uses children as the main characters, but it does not mean that it is only intended for children (Shavit, 1999; Dominic, 2012; The Guardian, 2015). In a closer look, it is more complex than it actually seems and worth discussing, even for adults, as any other literary works (Hunt, 2006).

In general, children's literature presents light themes such as family, friendship, and adventure that contain moral values in a language style that is easy to understand. Therefore, most researches focus on the moral values that exist in the works of children's literature. However, the themes are increasingly expanded to sensitive topics such as racism, LGBTQ+, social issues, etc. (Smolkin & Young, 2011; Johnson, 2014). Some writers even cleverly use children's literature as a medium to convey criticism with dark humor or satire without ignoring the fact that the work is intended for children (Encyclopedia, 2022). However, there is still little research that highlights parental rejection issues in children's literature, especially in the realm of psychological approach.

One of the studies on psychoanalysis in children's literature was conducted by Afkarina and Mila (2019). They analyzed the psychoanalysis of the main character's personality in the *Moana* movie based on the theory of id, ego, and super-ego by Sigmund Freud. There is also a thesis by Tanner (2021) which discusses the portrayals of mental illness in Disney Princesses that might influence children. She used the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders to analyze and diagnosed five Princesses in the Disney movies.

Compared to the previous research, this current study discusses exclusively the parental rejection presented in *The Willoughbys* (2020) movie using a psychological approach through Parental Acceptance-Rejection theory (PARTheory). This issue deserves to be discussed considering the huge influence of family, especially parents, in children's life. Parents could affect children's mental health, intimate relationships, or even the relationship with their future children (Sobrinho, Campos, & Holden, 2016; Rohner, et al., 2019).

Moreover, sensitive issues such as this are usually rated R and intended for adults; meanwhile, *The Willoughbys* (2020) is allowed for children from the age of 8 years with parental guidance. On the one hand, children can enjoy the movie and learn not to make any rash decisions; and on the other hand, parents can have a better understanding that children really need love and guidance from them. Therefore, the study of parental rejection in *The Willoughby* (2020) is essential to understand the effects of parental treatment on children, especially those related to rejection, which may remain until the child enters adulthood.

## METHOD

A qualitative method was used to investigate the issue of this current study. It attempts to interpret phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 3). Since it does not require numerical data, it is focused on understanding people's beliefs, experiences, attitudes, behavior, and interactions (Pathak, Jena, & Kalra, 2013). Moreover, through the psychological approach, the researchers referred to the concept of Parental Acceptance-Rejection theory (PARTheory) to understand and confirm the effect of parental rejection portrayed in the movie. Based on the theory, parental acceptance is defined in the form of warmth, comfort, or love received by children from parents or other caregivers. On the other hand, parental rejection is divided into four principal expressions: cold and unaffectionate, hostile and aggressive, indifferent and neglecting, and undifferentiated rejecting (Rohner, Khaleque, & Cournoyer, Introduction to parental acceptance-rejection theory, methods, evidence, and implications, 2012). In this research, the first child of the Willoughbys family, Tim Willoughby, became the main focus of the study.

There are several steps that had been done to complete the research. First, the researchers had to gather data from the movie. Most of the data would be in the form of scenes and dialogues in the movie. They were obtained by watching and re-watching the movies several times to get a better understanding of the events and storylines. While doing so, the researchers also did note-taking and highlighted the important scenes related to the issue. It was one of the most important steps because it helped to get detailed information. Thus, it helped to get a better understanding and also deeper meanings of the movie. After that, the researchers identified and filtered the data in notes. The data that was considered irrelevant to the issue were removed. It was intended to narrow the scope of analysis. It also should be noted that the researchers only focused on the effect of parental rejection of the first child, Tim Willoughby. Afterward, the researchers were grouping the data to be analyzed.

The next step was to analyze the data. Reading supporting data from outside references such as journals, books, and websites were also done to assist in the analysis of the issue. Finally, the results of the analysis are systematically arranged in this article along with the conclusion. All important steps are important to be able to analyze data optimally and accurately.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section is divided into four sub-chapters. These sub-chapters reveal the effects of parental rejection experienced by Tim Willoughby such as his view of the world, his dependency level, his relationship with others, and also his mental state.

### Tim's view of the world

Many people are aware that children see the world in quite different ways than adults. It is discovered that they make a better sense of the world at the age of twelve and up (Wilkins, 2010). It is supported by the four stages of cognitive development proposed by

Jean Piaget. Piaget also suggested several features which affect how children learn and grow such as schemas, assimilation, accommodation, and equilibration. All of them are important, especially schema or the psychological and physical actions that affect the understanding and knowledge of individuals. He explains that schemas always add up over time and it is used to assist in explaining and comprehending the world around us (Piaget, 1962, as cited in Cherry, 2022). Moreover, adults sometimes use children's literature to understand children's minds because they reflect children's viewpoints and mental states that are different from adults (Hunt, 2006; Freeman, Feeney, & Moravcik, 2011). However, children's movies are now becoming more similar to movies that targeted adult audiences which also discuss sensitive or taboo subjects (Kümmerling-Meibauer, 2013). It is clearly mirrored in *The Willoughbys* (2020) because it tells the adventure of four siblings who were rejected and neglected by their parents.

According to PARTheory, rejected individuals frequently generate a bad view of the world (Rohner, Khaleque, & Cournoyer, Introduction to parental acceptance-rejection theory, methods, evidence, and implications, 2012). It is understandable since they get unpleasant experiences in their life especially if they have never seen or felt the good side of life. In addition, apart from eliciting emotional responses, it is also proven that the pain when someone gets rejected is about the same as when they experience physical pain (Eisenberger, Lieberman, & Williams, 2003; Lieberman & Eisenberger, 2006). Thus, the painful emotions and experiences make them see the world as a dangerous place. It is related to the concept of mental representation which is people's conception of self, others, and also the world that they take for granted. Once it is shaped, they often use it as a guide to see or avoid certain kinds of circumstances or people (Rohner, Khaleque, & Cournoyer, Introduction to parental acceptance-rejection theory, methods, evidence, and implications, 2012).

In *The Willoughbys* (2020), the phenomenon of parental rejection is presented throughout this movie. As the first child, Tim Willoughby has definitely experienced the longest time of neglect. He is rejected and neglected since the first day he was born, often locked up in the coal bin for things that were not even his fault, and he also never left the house. It can be seen when he and his siblings are kicked out of the house because his younger sister, Jane, brought a baby orphan into the house. Tim reacts differently than his siblings when Jane proposes to find a home for the baby. When Jane and the twins are excited to leave the house, Tim looks panicked. All his life Tim confined in the old-fashioned house of the Willoughbys. The Willoughbys' house is located in between two big and tall buildings. It is in stark contrast to the conditions around it. Their house is still surrounded by trees and looks cool in the midst of countless skyscrapers in the city. Not only does the house look old-fashioned, but life inside the house is also very traditional and conservative. Thus, Tim contemplates leaving the house because he does not know anything about the outside world. For him, despite the behavior of his parents, home is the most comfortable and safest place rather than the outside world. It becomes his comfort zone. Eventually, his limited safe space and social interaction affect his view of the world as a dangerous and unsafe place because he is not familiar with it (Dandelion Training and Development, 2021).

In addition, Tim also does not seem to know how things work in society. He crosses the street without looking around. Again, this is because he does not get an education from his parents about how to behave outside the home. As a result, he does not understand the existing social rules. We can see that parents play an important role in giving threat information and safety education to their children (Muris & Field, 2010). Furthermore, unlike his siblings who seem excited, Tim looks very uncomfortable being outside. He becomes tense, jumpy, and nervous about things around him. At one point, he is peed his pants because he almost get hit by a bus. All of that happened because he has never explored the outside world so his perception of the outside world is filled with threats and dangers (McLeod, Wood, & Weisz, 2007).

Moreover, Tim still seems unfamiliar to the modern things or technology. As it is stat-



ed before, the Willoughbys family is described as an old-fashioned family living in the middle of an urban area. Mother spends her time knitting and Father is always by her side. They do not even have a television in the house which can be a medium for them to connect with the outside world (Roberts & III, 2014; Garey, 2021). So, even though Tim is the oldest child and should have more experience than his siblings, he does not. For instance, he calls the brochure "a folded piece of shiny paper" and the television "a moving painting". It indicates that Tim has very little knowledge. He does not know about as simple as the name of an item. Poor language skill is the result of parental rejection which is neglect (Benedan, Powell, Zajac, Lum, & Snow, 2018).

Consequently, even though the parents and the children live in the same house, they seem to live in two different worlds. Parents who should be the first teachers for their children to teach about the outside world, technology, or even basic knowledge do not occur in this movie. Hence, when Tim goes out for the first time, he sees the world as a foreign and dangerous place. He does not know the social rules that should regulate how an individual behaves in society. Additionally, he is also a stranger to technology that exists in the modern world because he has been living in an old-fashion house without technology all his life. It can be concluded that parental rejection affects people's perception of the world and subsequently determine their perspective in life.

### **Tim's dependency level**

Dependency is a natural thing, especially for children (Rees, 2007). They depend on their parents to take care of them and fulfill their needs so that they can grow up and develop well physically and emotionally (Dhar, 2022). Studies even have proven that healthy relationships between parents and children resulted in positive outcomes (Moore, Kinghorn, & Bandy, 2011). Nevertheless, the level of dependency on children should be outgrown when children are mature enough (O'Mara, 1991). It also cannot be separated from the influence of parents in teaching their children to be independent and responsible for themselves. However, parental figures rarely appear or entirely missing in children's literature. Besides teaching children about diverse family structures, its primary reason is children are the target viewers (Cheung, Leung, & Huang, 2022). So, movie producers follow the target market by focusing on children's characters.

Moreover, in PARTheory, the word dependence also describes the mental or psychological desire for emotional support, affection, or any other positive response from important figures in their life (Rohner, Khaleque, & Cournoyer, Introduction to parental acceptance-rejection theory, methods, evidence, and implications, 2012). Children often make behavioral bids such as clinging, whining, or crying to their parents to fulfill these needs. However, rejected children only make a few numbers of those actions or even deny their needs because of the physiological hurt that they have experienced (Rohner, Khaleque, & Cournoyer, Introduction to parental acceptance-rejection theory, methods, evidence, and implications, 2012).

In *The Willoughbys* (2020), even though the parental figures are physically mentioned and exist in the movie, they are still absent emotionally. It is because the presence of children is something that the couple or the parents never dreams of. Therefore, when Tim Willoughby was born, they were shocked. Thus, Tim also does not feel the affection of his parents at all from the day he was born. Father states that Tim's birth is an insult to the Mother. It indicates that Tim's existence is not wanted by both of his parents. Moreover, his father insistently states that he will not fulfill his needs for love and affection that Tim should "find it elsewhere." So, we can see that Tim is rejected and neglected since he was born. He could not depend on his parents. It may be one of the things that cause him to be obsessed with his ancestors. Their histories and legends become the foundations to set the principles and standards in his life. He made them substitute for his parents as his role models. It is most likely to be true since, for most children, parents or caregivers are the most important role model in their life (American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psy-



**Figure 1.** Tim acts as the man of the house

chiatry, 2017).

After having siblings, Tim feels a sense of obligation to take care of them. He unconsciously replaces the parent figure for his siblings or parentified. A parentified child is a term for those who experience parentification. It is a phenomenon when a child has to substitute parents' role in providing support for their own parents or siblings which is also a form of parental neglect (West, 2022). In the movie, Tim watches over and warns his siblings not to do the things his parents hate to keep them all, especially himself, out of trouble. On one occasion, he is punished for the actions of his siblings and he has to sleep in a coal bin. The next morning, he goes out on his own through the chimney. It indicates that Tim is no longer dependent on his parents. He already knows that his parents would not open the door for him to come out. They may not even notice that he is missing because they are busy with their love.

In addition, Tim also often imparts the principles he learned from their ancestors to his siblings. For instance, he said "Willoughbys do not beg for food" and "Willoughbys do not trespass"; it shows his efforts to teach his siblings even though he is still equally not well-educated either. When they succeed in getting rid of their parents, he refers to the family as a proper family and himself as the man of the house. Tim's definition of a proper family omits the existence of parental figures. It happened because he does not have any emotional attachment to his parents. Emotional detachment can occur because of the lack of parental support in children's life (Pace & Zappulla, 2013), and it is something that has never been experienced by Tim and his siblings. We can also see Tim's attempts to regulate the family in figure 1.

In figure 1, Tim is wearing a fake mustache. Mustaches are something that the Willoughbys family is very proud of, it was even explained by the narrator that the women in the family also had mustaches. It also often associated with one's maturity and responsibility (Wells, 2015). Therefore, Tim takes the fake mustache from their home display and uses it as a sign that he would be responsible for his siblings. In addition, he takes the position at the end of the table which is usually reserved for the father in the family while his siblings sit on the left side of the table. The sitting position also indicates that he is the leader so the other people in that room are under his control (Tirado, 2012). When his siblings ask for food, he sets the food table in such a way as he refers to it as "a proper family meal". After that, he takes the lobster display from the wall which is certainly not edible. When his siblings are about to leave the house, Tim forbids them to go. It shows that his habit of being responsible for his siblings makes him feel powerful after their parents leave. It also can be seen as the characteristics of oldest child syndrome which is a term to define common characteristics based on birth order. Some of the characteristics are responsible, ambitious, determined, and domineering (Gillis, 2022). Those characteristics are undeniably apparent in Tim's behavior. However, we can also see that

there is still a childish part of him as he is often daydreaming and uses a lot of imagination. It indicates that Tim is not ready to take over their parents' position for his siblings. It is reasonable because the human brain is fully developed until they reached the age of mid-20s (Arain, et al., 2013). On the other hand, a parentified child is demanded to be mature with minimum experience and knowledge (Martin, 2020). Thus, it makes Tim has no idea about the way to regulate a family or fill the role of his parents properly.

Furthermore, we can also assume that Tim has to learn everything by himself. It can be seen from the fact that neither he nor his siblings go to school in the movie. It is unquestionable that education is important for children. It has 4 core purposes: personal, cultural, economic, and social which prepare students for their future (Robinson & Robinson, 2022). In the modern world, schools also facilitate students with technology supplies and materials. In *The Willoughbys* (2020), Tim Willoughby is already 14 years old which means he should be in middle school. However, being a neglected child, he knows that he cannot rely on his parents to give him access to education by sending him and his siblings to school. Moreover, living in a traditional household also contributed to Tim's technology illiteracy. It can be perceived when Tim tries to open the Nanny's cellphone.

Tim uses his face to unlock the phone. It is the second time that he secretly took the Nanny's phone. The first time, he did it after eavesdropping on the nanny's conversation with his parents. He was confused when the screen showed "Slide to Unlock". He tried to rub the phone on other objects, but it did not work. Eventually, the cellphone fell on his face. After that, he accidentally slides it on his face and it opened. Thus, he uses his face to open the phone in his second attempt. It shows that Tim most likely learns from his own experience. In fact, children are mostly learning from their experiences (Clark, 2014). Furthermore, Tim is used to the ignorance of his parents that he has to learn everything by himself.

In *The Willoughby* (2020), the children try to orphan themselves by sending their parents on a vacation with deadly destinations. However, after becoming involved with the Orphan Service, they must separate and the only way for them to be reunited is to prove that they are not orphans. It makes them determined to find their parents and track them to their final destination, The Unclimbable Alps. By the time they found their parents, Tim begs to them.

### Dialogue 1

**Tim** : Look, we are not a perfect family. We're not even a good family. But you need us to get down this alp, and once we're down there, we need you so that we can all stay together. You don't have to love us, but will thou be our parents again? Please.

(Kris Pearn, *The Willoughbys*, 2020; duration 01:12:42-01:13:05)

In dialogue 1, Tim is defensively independent. It is because he denied his craving for affection, love, and care when he actually still really needed it. He said those words so that his parents would come back with him and his siblings. He puts aside his desire to get the love of his parents in order to reunite with his other siblings. Moreover, he may also do that to protect his own feelings from possible rejection from his parents. Also, according to PARTheory, intense psychological pain could trigger rejected children to be closed-off about their feelings in an attempt to protect themselves from being hurt (Rohner, Khaleque, & Cournoyer, Introduction to parental acceptance-rejection theory, methods, evidence, and implications, 2012). Tim is so used to rejection from his parents that he tries to lessen his disappointment at his parents' possible response by saying that he does not need their love.

Training children to be independent is a must so that they can be responsible for themselves. However, it is normally done step by step. They need to be trained gradually. In the movie, Tim is forced to be independent since he was a baby. Thus, he is not depend-



ent on his parents at all. It eventually leads to the thought that he does not need them anymore. Moreover, the emotional abuse and neglect he experienced made him and his siblings finally decide to send their parents on deadly vacations. It can be seen that they indirectly plotted the murder of their own parents. It indicates that childhood trauma can trigger psychotic disorder (Bendall, Jackson, Hulbert, & McGorry, 2008; Varese, et al., 2012). Moreover, he is parentified because he becomes a parent figure for his siblings. He was not able to enjoy his childhood like other children his age. He bears the responsibility that is over his capacity as a child. So, even though he is familiar with responsibilities, his mental state has not yet shown maturity with a mix of reality and imagination. The study also found that parentified children have a greater chance of developing depression than adults (Lo, 2019). As for his behavior that denies the need for love and affection from their parents, it will also make him difficult to receive affection from others because he is not used to such treatment. Therefore, parents must adjust and control the level of independence of their children according to their age so that children can grow optimally.

### Tim and his relationship with others

Children's literature is a reflection of realities from children's perspectives. They unavoidably highlight children's interactions with other characters that help children to build up their social and emotional skills (Pinto, 2019). Therefore, many literary studies are interested to scrutinize children's characters in children's literature. Children's representations are also important because it becomes a medium where children initially learn and discover the world that they live in (Braga, 2022).

In general, humans are social creatures, which means they cannot live without the help of others (Young, 2008). Even though individuals have become adults, they still need other people in their lives. Thus, children are trained to socialize from their childhood so that they have good social skills when they grow up. Parental rejection can make it difficult for a person to socialize. PARTheory suggests that positive attitudes from attachment figures (parents or significant others) are a powerful influence so that when it is not fulfilled, children tend to respond emotionally and behaviorally in specific ways (Rohner, Khaleque, & Cournoyer, Introduction to parental acceptance-rejection theory, methods, evidence, and implications, 2012). They have tendencies to isolate themselves, distrust others to protect their feelings, and have trouble expressing their feelings as well as accepting affection from others (Rohner, Khaleque, & Cournoyer, 2012; Gillete, 2022).

In the movie, Tim never gets the love and affection of his parents. In contrast, he is often blamed and punished by them. Therefore, it caused him to have problems accepting love from others. It can be seen when Linda, the Nanny hired by their parents, comes to the house. She is described as a chubby woman who is funny, attentive, and caring. Unlike their parents who are despised all kinds of childish needs, Linda begins her introduction by saying that she is responsible to service all of the childish needs. Her nice personality instantly captivates Jane and the twins. However, Tim's experiences of constant neglect make him unable to trust Linda easily just like his siblings. He does not believe her because Linda is working for their parents. So, he thinks that she is also a bad person just like their parents.

### Dialogue 2

**Tim** : Insidious! Devil woman! We have to get rid of her. Fast! Nanny is working for our parents, and now she's brainwashed Jane. She has to go.

(Kris Pearn, *The Willoughbys*, 2020; duration 00:30:19-00:30:38)

In dialogue 2, we can see that Tim cannot immediately accept Linda's presence in their

home. He refers to her as a bad woman. It reveals that he has bad thoughts toward Linda because she works for their parents. Therefore, he thinks of getting rid of her because in his eyes their parents are bad people. So, he assumes there is a possibility that Linda is a bad person too since she works for them. Children's thoughts about the perception and intentions of other people, particularly strangers, are influenced by their parents (Stolle & Nishikawa, 2011). Children who were raised in a safe and stable family would most likely trust others easily compared with children from unstable families (Uslaner, 2002). It is because trusting others means being willing to be vulnerable with them. However, as explained before, rejected children often avoid vulnerability as a defense mechanism to protect their feelings from painful experiences (Fritscher, 2021). Thus, Tim cannot trust Linda straightaway. He even believes that Linda has brainwashed Jane. It points out that Tim's behaviors have entered the paranoia stage which is characterized by excessive mistrust to others as a result of his trauma (Bird, et al., 2021). It becomes an issue because Tim thinks of illogical reasons as an excuse to despise Linda. He does not want to admit that Jane and Linda have the same interest in music. We can notice that Tim's paranoia disturbs his relationship with others. Tim could not see or rather does not believe in the genuine affection that Linda gives them. It is because he never got it. It shows another effect of being rejected which struggle to accept any kind of affection (Gillete, 2022).

Moreover, when Tim is peeking beside the door while his siblings eating Linda's food, Linda, who caught him staring, immediately calls him. However, instead of coming closer, Tim immediately switches to the ready to attack position. Not only gestures, but Tim also growls when Linda tries to approach him which means he does not trust her. He sees Linda as a threat. Children who live in abusive households commonly hold different identification of threat detection and reaction because they are exposed to the threat of violence at an early age (Miller, 2015). Therefore, even though Linda does not seem to be a threat, Tim still feels not safe about Linda's presence at the Willoughbys' house. It causes him to be stressed and reacted in such a way because he cannot manage his emotions. As in PARTheory, rejected children can control their emotions as good as children in general when faced with stressful situations (Rohner, Khaleque, & Cournoyer, Introduction to parental acceptance-rejection theory, methods, evidence, and implications, 2012). Additionally, parental rejection makes children grow avoidant attachment styles such as a strong sense of independence, fear of intimacy, and difficulty in trusting others, especially those related to their parents (Gillete, 2022).

Furthermore, when their relationship started to improve and Tim starts to trust Linda, Tim overhears her conversation with his parents on phone. At that time, Tim secretly takes Linda's phone and sees their conversation. He also shows what he found to his siblings. In the message, their father sent a voice note telling Linda that they will sell the house and she can "dispose" of the children as she wishes. Linda's reply which reads "Got the message about the house. As for the children I will take care of them" is read with a bad tone by Tim. Eventually, he reports Linda to the Orphan Service as a bad nanny which causes him and his siblings to separate. It indicates that even though Linda has earned Tim's trust, he does not fully trust her and still has suspicions about her. The interpretation of ambiguity in children is constantly correlated with anxiety (Stuijzand, Creswell, Field, Pearcey, & Dodd, 2018). Thus, Linda's message which meant to look after and care for the children is interpreted differently by Tim. He thought she would throw them away as ordered by their parents. It is because Tim never expects to be loved, but is more inclined towards the treatment that he is familiar with, rejected. As rejected children experienced childhood maltreatment, they develop a higher level of distrust and threat perception (Hepp, Schmitz, Urbild, Zauner, & Niedtfeld, 2021). These factors contribute to children's inability to maintain healthy relationships with others.

Training children to socialize is important because it helps them to mingle in society. When they can maintain good relationships with others, they are more likely to have no trouble socializing as adults (Raising Children, 2020; Wallace, 2022). However, children who experience parental rejection have a tendency to have difficulty establishing relation-

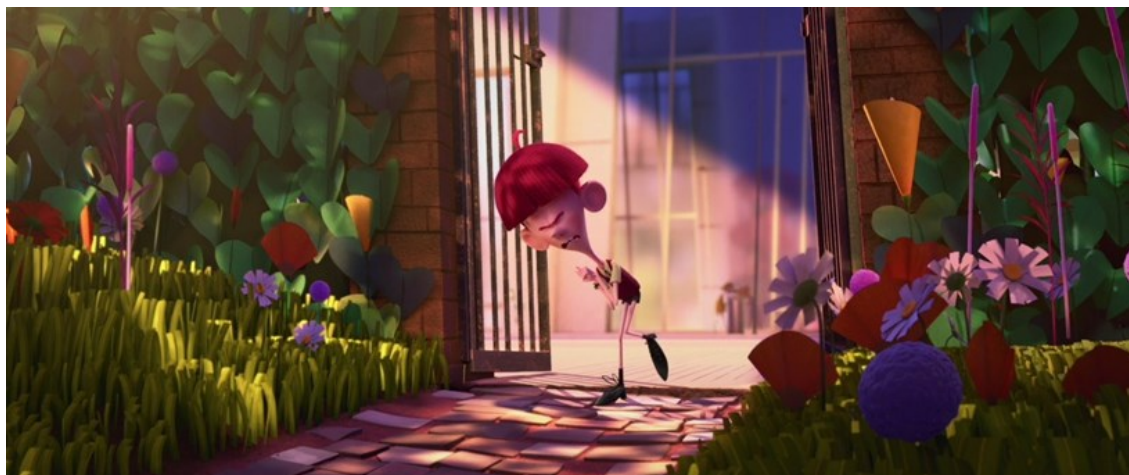
ships with other people. It is unconsciously done as a form of self-defense (Rohner, Khaleque, & Cournoyer, Introduction to parental acceptance-rejection theory, methods, evidence, and implications, 2012). Their experiences with their parents caused them to generalize about other people. At some point, it can have a big impact on someone's future. It might make it difficult for them to find a partner because they cannot express their feelings or cannot trust their partner (Gillete, 2022; Davis, 2022). In addition, when they have their own children, they may also find it difficult to form relationships with them and might neglect them also (Holland, 2021). Therefore, children's ability to socialize needs to be honed from an early age, and maintaining a good relationship between parents and children is very important.

### **Tim and his mental state**

In today's world, mental illness when someone reaches adulthood is not something surprising. However, there are still many people who are not aware of the mental condition of children even though the mental condition of children during childhood can have an important impact and carry over into their adulthood (Mulraney, et al., 2021). In fact, the scale of acceptance-rejection effect and psychological adjustment in childhood is greater than in adulthood because they are still under the direct influences of parents (Rohner R. P., 1999; Shorey, 2019). Children's mental condition of children is still very unstable. They do not know how to cope or deal with stressful situations (Wisner, 2022). In this condition, parents play a role in assisting their children so that they can know the right way to deal with stressful conditions (Kids Health, 2022). In the case of parental rejection, children do not get assistance from their parents so they have to deal with and try to solve their own problems. Furthermore, parents put their children in situations that can trigger mental health issues with emotional pain or neglect (Mendo-Lázaro, León-del-Barco, Polo-del-Río, Yuste-Tosina, & López-Ramos, 2019). In the field of children's literature nowadays, the issue of mental illness is not uncommon (Wojcik-Andrews, 2018).

As discussed in the previous sub-chapter, Tim spends most of his life inside the house. It made him a stranger to the outside world. However, apart from that, it also affected his mental state. Anxiety is one of the most common consequences of emotional neglect (Schimmenti & Bifulco, 2015; Marston, 2020). Tim shows signs of anxiety when he first leaves the house where he experiences excessive fear of the outside world. Tim's fear is also visually visible in figure 2.

Tim's expression clearly showed that he is terrified. He also clenches his hands in front of his chest which in body language indicate negative emotions such as anxiety (Parvez, Body language: Hands clasped in front, 2020). He even walks backward and contem-



**Figure 2.** Tim is afraid leaving the house

plates stepping his foot outside which means he feels uncomfortable, nervous, and not confident in his decision to leave the house (Parvez, 2021). Neglected children tend to have difficulty handling situations they are not familiar with. Some research found that neglected children experienced massive development in their brains which is in charge of survival and it leads to anxiety (Avdibegovic & Brkic, 2020). It means neglected children are constantly in survival mode which can allow them to have a lot of thoughts about the possible consequences of a situation. Therefore, Tim is terrified when he leaves the house because he is not familiar with the situation outside. He perceives the outside world as a dangerous place because he cannot predict what will happen. At one point, Tim's reaction can also be seen as an early sign of agoraphobia because he has an intense fear of leaving the house (Elia, 2021).

In addition, after Linda is reported, the children of the Willoughbys are under the care of the Orphan Service. Tim is the only one who cannot stay with one family for a long time. He has always run away from the family he is paired with by the Orphan Service. It may be because she is having a hard time adjusting to the new family. Eventually, he is confined to a room in the Orphan Service. At one moment, Linda tries to save him by disguising herself as one of the officers. Linda determines to release him and reunites him with his siblings. However, unexpectedly, Tim refused the invitation.

### Dialogue 3

**Linda** : Get in the oat cart. I'm busting you out

**Tim** : I do not deserve this busting you speak of. Leave me, Phil, to my short-panted guilt.

(Kris Pearn, *The Willoughbys*, 2020; duration 00:56:11-00:56:25)

In dialogue 3, we can notice that Tim feels ashamed and sorry for his misconduct toward Linda. Shame is frequently linked to fear of rejection and abandonment as they see the flaws determine their worth (Deblinger & Runyon, 2005; Davis, 2022). So, Tim does not want to leave the Orphan Service even though he does not like being there. He felt that he deserved to be there. Tim's behavior reflects another indicator of self-sabotage and self-hate caused by parental rejection (Gillete, 2022). Other than that, Tim gives such a response because when he parted from his siblings, he was scolded by Jane. She is angry with him because Tim's misunderstanding with Linda led him to report her to the Orphan Service. Jane listed all of Tim's bad deeds such as he lied about Linda, getting rid of Ruth (the orphan baby), being bossy, mean, mustachless, and short-panted. As one of his siblings, Jane is such an important person in Tim's life that Jane's words are meaningful to him. It also shows that Tim might suffer from Rejection Sensitive Dysphoria (RSD) which makes him unable to handle criticism, especially from his own siblings (The Ed Psych Practice, 2021). Criticism might overwhelm them with negative emotions such as hurt, anger, or sadness. Subsequently, Jane's criticism caused Tim to look down on himself and felt that he is not worthy of love.

Moreover, when Linda persuades him again to come with her, Tim no longer sounds proud to be a part of the Willoughbys. He instead refers to himself as "Will-not-be"; it indicates that his quarrel with Jane had a major effect on him. It makes him have low self-esteem. As in PARTheory, rejected individuals are predicted to develop feelings of impaired self-esteem and self-adequacy (Rohner, Khaleque, & Cournoyer, Introduction to parental acceptance-rejection theory, methods, evidence, and implications, 2012). It is because he felt he failed to fulfill his dream to become the great Willoughbys as his ancestors. If there is no intervention, bad thoughts about oneself in children can trigger insecurity in children specifically if they grow up in an environment where they don't feel secure, loved, or valued (Goodman, 2019). For this reason, children who experience parental rejection still need the presence of a supportive caregiver or attachment figure to be able to help them cope, especially with regard to their mental condition (Rohner,



Khaleque, & Cournoyer, Introduction to parental acceptance-rejection theory, methods, evidence, and implications, 2012). Linda who is basically affectionate gives advice to Tim and opens his mind that all the Willoughbys children are great. It makes Tim rise from adversity and be optimistic again.

Fears are natural for children, especially about things they are not familiar with. However, excessive and unreasonable fears will usually go away as they grow up (Tahilani, 2021). In this case, parents play a role to provide reassurance and assistance to their children to reduce the intensity of these fears (Salcuni, Dazzi, Mannarini, Di Riso, & Delvecchio, 2015). These actions are not done by parents in *The Willoughbys* (2020). Thus, Tim was nervous when he left the house for the first time because he had absolutely no knowledge about the outside world. His parents did not teach him anything or give him a message before kicking them out of the house. Furthermore, neglected children are also more emotionally unstable than children in general (Gillete, 2022). It is because emotionally they have felt psychological pain at a very young age.

## CONCLUSION

The issue of parental rejection is very clear in *The Willoughbys* (2020). It had a direct impact on the children in the Willoughbys family especially their first child, Tim Willoughby. First, parental rejection affected Tim's view of the world. It happened because his parents extremely neglected him, paid him no attention at all, and punished him if they felt he bothered them. They also did not give him access to education so his life was isolated in their traditional and conservative house. Second, parental rejection caused him not to have a dependency level like children his age. He became defensively independent because he was required to be mature at an early age. Third, the two previous effects indirectly affected his relationship with others. It was because Tim had a hard time trusting others, receiving affection, and expressing himself. Lastly, parental rejection also affected Tim's mental state where he felt he did not deserve the love of others as his parents had treated him all along. It led him to develop several mental illnesses such as anxiety, insecurity, and RSD. He also cannot control his emotions and thoughts when faced with a stressful situation. Consequently, this current research reveals that parental rejection has a significant effect on child development as shown in *The Willoughbys*. Furthermore, childhood is a crucial period for individuals. It was a time when they learned a lot about life, society, and the world. Children's experiences in childhood can shape their character when they reach adulthood. Sometimes, parents are not aware that the thoughts of children and adults are very different. The words and actions of parents can be interpreted differently by their children. Therefore, this current study suggests that parents should take into consideration of their words and actions when dealing with their children. They also have to pay attention to the development of their children and consider doing a consultation if they find symptoms that indicate problems in their children so that they can be treated immediately. Hence, the disorders would not have long-term effects when children enter adulthood.

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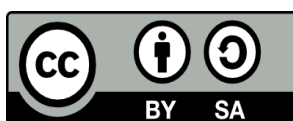
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