

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A.1 Background Of Research

Having a child is every human being's dream, almost all humans on earth have the desire to continue their offspring. Especially for married people who are in a relationship to build a household. However, some of them decide not to have children because of several factors that make them decide not to have children, for example, the very high cost of living makes someone reluctant to have children. There are also people who have children but either the husband or wife has their own busy lives such as working and do not having time together for the child, which affects the child's character in the future (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997).

Children who grow up without the presence or involvement of a father figure are at risk of experiencing emotional, behavioral, and social challenges. The absence of a father can affect a child's sense of security and identity, leading to difficulties in developing trust and forming healthy relationships. Research has shown that children who lack paternal involvement often exhibit lower self-esteem, poor academic performance, and an increased likelihood of engaging in risky behaviors (Pleck & Masciadrelli, 2004). The father plays a crucial role in modeling discipline, providing emotional support, and shaping the child's worldview. When a father is emotionally or physically absent, especially during critical developmental stages, the child may feel abandoned, unloved, or rejected.

This emotional gap can manifest in feelings of anger, mistrust, or defiance toward parental authority figures, and may continue to affect the child into adolescence and adulthood (Allen et al., 2007). Therefore, the father-child dynamic is not only significant for emotional well-being, but also for the development of a stable and resilient identity.

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It is important to understand the dynamics that exist in family life, and how parental behaviors, attitudes, and expectations affect the growth and development of children. Healthy parent-child dynamics are typically characterized by mutual respect, open communication, emotional support, and appropriate boundaries, allowing children to learn on their own while still feeling safe and loved. Unhealthy parent-child dynamics, on the other hand, can lead to issues such as insecurity, behavioral problems, and later difficulties in building healthy relationships with children (Baumrind, 1991; Belsky, 1984).

The parent-child relationship requires ongoing change and understanding. Parents must navigate the challenges of teaching and disciplining children while fostering autonomy, and children must learn to balance dependence with greater independence. Dynamics in the relationships between individuals can occur due to changes in nature, behavior, or conditions that affect these entities (Wawondatu, Liando, and Lolowang 2024).

Sometimes the relationship between parents and children does not always go well. Unlike families who have harmonious relationships, there are dynamics that make the relationship between parents and children do not go well. Problems that we often encounter in our surroundings, for example, are broken homes (Amato, 2000).

In the film *The Whale* (2022) directed by Darren Aronofsky, the dynamics between parents and children is central theme that depicts the complexity of

family relationships. The film explores the relationship between Charlie and his daughter, Ellie. The parent-child dynamics in the film are full of redemption and the search for understanding, reflecting the deep impact of past trauma, guilt, and suppressed love.

A24 and Protozoa Pictures launched film *The Whale* (2022), a film directed by Darren Aronofsky and directed by Jeremy Dawson which is based on the drama written by Samuel D. Hunter in 2012, starring Charlie as the very fat English teacher Charles, Ellie as a Charlie daughter, Thomas as Christian missionary, Liz who cares for Charlie, Samantha Morton as Mary, Charlie's ex-wife and Ellie's mother. Researcher is interested in examining the parent-child dynamics found in the film, especially the character Charlie and Ellie. The relationship between Charlie and his child was complicated. It is because Charlie left both his wife and his daughter. It caused his daughter hates Charlie very much.

Previously, in movie *The Whale*, Charlie and Ellie's relationship is layered and emotional, reflecting a longing for repair, tension, and past hurt. During his bad condition, Charlie, haunted by guilt, tries to reconnect with his estranged daughter. However, Ellie is an angry teenager who feels her father abandoned her and betrayed her. Ellie grew up without Charlie's guidance, sees her father as a selfish figure who chose relationships with other partner over his family. The film depicts Charlie's struggle to reconnect with a broken relationship, while Ellie remains skeptical of his intentions.

Their relationship shows the complex mechanism of redemption. Rather than “buy” Ellie’s forgiveness, Charlie helps her to ensure she leaves something meaningful for her daughter. Despite resistance, this sincerity eventually begins to open Ellie’s softer side. Even when family ties seem to be broken, their relationship shows the power of familial love. The movie does not provide easy answers. Instead, it shows that despite deep trauma and pain, there is still room for strong relationships.

Although *The Whale* (2022) as a contemporary film presents a portrait of the complex emotional relationship between Charlie and his daughter Ellie, there are not many academic studies that deeply analyze this relationship through a systematic theoretical framework. The use of attachment theory in this context will help to reveal more deeply how the experience of attachment, neglect, and the search for affection are represented through characterization and narrative in the film. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap in the literature by examining the dynamics of the father-daughter relationship in *The Whale* through the lens of Bowlby's attachment theory to understand how cinematic representations can reflect or challenge the dynamics of relationships in the context of real families.

This research focused on the relationship between Charlie and Ellie. To reveal the parent-child dynamics, Bowlby's attachment will be used to discuss the parent-child dynamics in the film.

A.2 Problems of the Research

1. How does past trauma influence the parent–child dynamics between Charlie and Ellie in *The Whale*?
2. How does Charlie attempt to rebuild his relationship with Ellie in *The Whale*?

A.3 Objectives of the Research

1. To identify and analyze the impact of past trauma on the parent–child relationship as portrayed in the film *The Whale*.
2. To examine the key factors that influence the reconciliation efforts between Charlie and Ellie in *The Whale*.

A.4 Significance of the Research

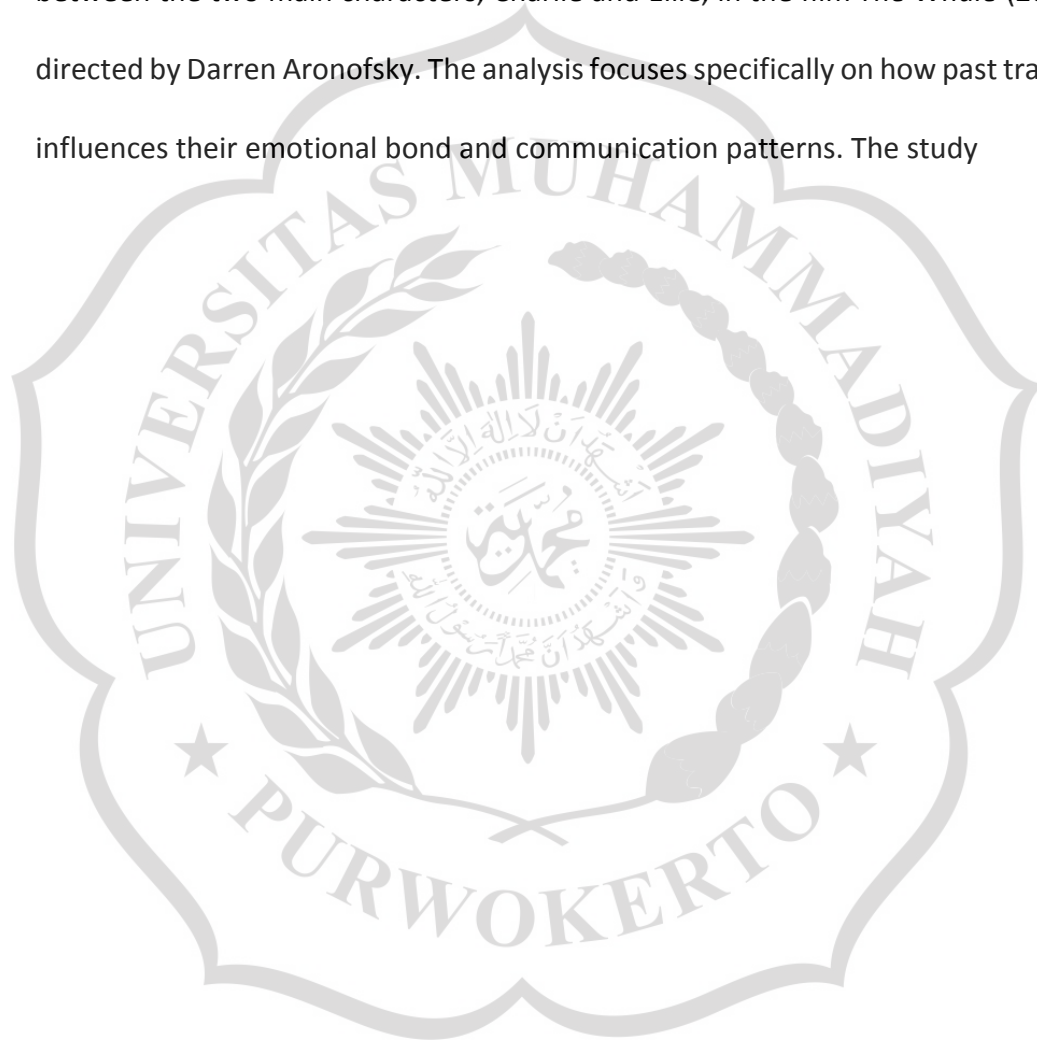
This research offers both theoretical and practical contributions: Theoretically, this study contributes to the understanding of parent-child dynamics through the perspective of John Bowlby's Attachment Theory. By analyzing *The Whale* movie, this research adds to the discourse on how attachment disorders such as emotional neglect, inconsistent parenting or parental absence manifest in relationships. It also provides insight into how cinematic narratives depict insecure attachment patterns, thereby enriching the academic dialogue in film studies.

Practically, this research serves as a reflection and source of inspiration for the audience, particularly married couples, by highlighting the importance of fostering healthy relationships with their children. These findings can provide

valuable lessons on avoiding emotional distance and fostering open communication within the family to prevent rifts between parents and children.

A.5 Limitation of the Problem

This study is limited to the analysis of the parent–child relationship between the two main characters, Charlie and Ellie, in the film *The Whale* (2022), directed by Darren Aronofsky. The analysis focuses specifically on how past trauma influences their emotional bond and communication patterns. The study



does not examine other characters in depth, such as Liz or Thomas, unless their roles directly contribute to the development of Charlie and Ellie's relationship.

Additionally, the analysis is confined to the narrative and visual elements within the film itself, without extending to the original stage play by Samuel D. Hunter. The theoretical framework is grounded in psychological perspectives, particularly Attachment Theory, and does not incorporate sociological, religious, or cultural readings of the film. Furthermore, this study does not aim to diagnose any psychological condition but instead interprets the characters' behaviors and interactions through a qualitative lens based on cinematic representation and theoretical interpretation.

A.6 Definition of Key Terms

In order to clarify the key terms used in this study, some definitions are put forward.

Parent-Child

A parent-child dynamics in a relationship occurs when one partner assumes a parental role while the other takes on the role of a child. This dynamic can develop between partners for a variety of reasons. However, it results in an imbalanced power dynamic. Resentment and dissatisfaction can arise because of this type of relationship dynamic. The parent makes the rules and takes control. This leads to dependency that works until the parent becomes too vindictive or the child decides to rebel (Brady, 2020).

Bowlby Attachment Theory

John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth collaborated to create attachment theory (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991). John Bowlby developed the fundamental ideas of the theory by incorporating ideas from developmental psychology, cybernetics, ethology, information processing, and psychoanalysis. Bretherton (1992) highlights a paradigm shift in understanding how child-caregiver attachment can be disrupted by factors such as loss, separation, and grief.

The Whale

Charlie and Ellie's relationship in the film "*The Whale*" (2022), directed by Darren Aronofsky, depicts the complex dynamics between a father and his estranged daughter. Charlie, played by Brendan Fraser, is a morbidly obese man who works as an online tutor.

Ellie, an angry, cynical, and rebellious teenager, is hurt by Charlie's departure from her family years earlier to live with her partner, Alan. As a result, Ellie grew up without a father figure and continued to harbor deep resentment and disappointment towards Charlie.

Charlie, who is currently struggling with health issues, sees this last chance to mend the relationship to give his life meaning. He gives Ellie money in hopes of getting to earn her forgiveness. Their relationship is fraught with emotional conflict throughout the film. Ellie is often dismissive and rude, while Charlie remains

patient even when insulted. While there is some tension, their conversations reveal Charlie's deep longing to be loved and accepted by his daughter, as well as Ellie's vulnerable side that hides beneath her cold demeanor.

Their relationship ultimately becomes the center of a heartfelt story that depicts themes of redemption, acceptance, and the complexities inherent in family relationships. The film shows how forgiveness and love can emerge in difficult situations.

A.7 Organization of the Research Report

The organization of the research consist of five chapters:

1. Chapter I introduces the background, research problems, objectives, significance, limitations, key terms, and structure of the research. The goal of the researcher's work is explained in this chapter.
2. Chapter II presents the theoretical framework and a review of relevant literature. In this part, the researcher describes the theory that was applied in this research.
3. Chapter III describes the research design, data sources, data collection, and analysis methods. It describes the procedures and methods for gathering data as well as how to analyze the data.
4. Chapter IV provides the data analysis and interpretation based on the theories.
5. Chapter V concludes the findings and offers suggestions for future research