

A Hundred Miles: A Screenplay on Maternal Rejection and an Adolescent Daughter's Emotional Struggles

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ABSTRACT

A Hundred Miles is a dramedy screenplay that explores the impact of perceived maternal rejection following parental divorce on an adolescent daughter's mental health, emotional well-being, personality, and interpersonal relationships. This screenplay aims to portray how perceived maternal rejection shapes the adolescent's mental health, personality, behavioral responses, and interpersonal relationships. The creative work was developed using Interpersonal Acceptance-Rejection Theory (IPARTheory) as its theoretical framework to ensure an accurate representation of the emotional and interpersonal impacts of perceived maternal rejection. The result is *A Hundred Miles*, a dramedy screenplay that portrays the psychological, behavioral, and interpersonal relationships impacts of perceived maternal rejection on an adolescent daughter.

Keywords: adolescence, dramedy, mental health, mother-daughter relationship, perceived maternal rejection

INTRODUCTION

The creative work explores the impact of perceived maternal rejection following parental divorce on an adolescent daughter's mental health. Perceived maternal rejection refers to a child's or adolescent's belief that their mother does not love, accept, or care for them, regardless of the mother's actual intentions (Rohner, 2021). Accordingly, this creative work focuses on Marie's perception of Lily's emotional unavailability rather than intentional rejection.

Adolescence is a critical developmental stage characterized by identity exploration, increasing independence, and psychological changes (Saidi et al., 2024). During this period, adolescents become more vulnerable to mental health problems, while emotional support from family can reduce negative outcomes such as emotional distress, neglectfulness, and antisocial behavior (Tariq et al., 2025; Adjei et al., 2025; Pan & Ye, 2024). Parental divorce may further disrupt this developmental process. Divorce often increases parental stress due to personal and financial difficulties, reducing parents' emotional availability toward their children (Basalamah & Pebriani, 2024). Murphy (2017) also found that divorced mothers may become less emotionally responsive, causing children to feel abandoned, unloved, and rejected. Although this emotional distance may be unintentional, adolescents may still perceive it as maternal rejection (Rohner, 2021). Maternal rejection is particularly influential because mothers generally play a significant role in caregiving, emotional involvement, and psychosocial development (Sofrona & Giannakopoulos, 2024). Consequently, an unhealthy mother-daughter relationship may hinder healthy personality development, interpersonal relationships, and mental well-being, contributing to anxiety, depression, insecurity, and attachment issues (Rohner, 2021). This topic was chosen because the mother-daughter relationship remains highly influential during adolescence and may shape long-term psychological development.

This creative work adopts the dramedy genre, which combines drama and comedy to explore serious issues such as divorce, illness, hardship, and emotional pain (Abreu, 2022; Evonne Leanna Davids, 2023). Humor is intentionally drawn from awkward situations, character contradictions, and situational irony rather than mental health struggles, providing emotional relief while maintaining audience engagement without undermining the seriousness of the narrative. The creative work is presented as a screenplay, a form that tells stories primarily through characters' actions, dialogue, and visual storytelling rather than narration (Provost, 2026). This format effectively conveys emotional

tension through facial expressions, body language, and cinematic techniques such as montage, series of shots, and flashbacks, allowing Marie's psychological struggles to be communicated visually.

Lady Bird (2017), written and directed by Greta Gerwig, serves as the primary influential work. The screenplay adopts its naturalistic dialogue, bittersweet tone, and gradual portrayal of mother-daughter conflict while distinguishing itself by emphasizing the psychological consequences of perceived maternal rejection following divorce and its effects on an adolescent daughter's mental health, personality, and interpersonal relationships. The screenplay follows Marie, a teenage girl from Jakarta who develops an unhealthy relationship with her mother after her parents' divorce, causing her to feel emotionally rejected at home. Hoping to escape, she moves to Bandung for college, but her unresolved emotional struggles continue to shape her decisions, relationships, and lifestyle. Through Marie's journey, the screenplay explores how perceived maternal rejection influences an adolescent daughter's mental health, personality, and interpersonal relationships.

Interpersonal Acceptance-Rejection Theory

Interpersonal Acceptance-Rejection Theory (IPARTheory), proposed by Ronald Preston Rohner (2021), explains how perceived acceptance or rejection from significant others affects an individual's emotional, behavioral, and psychological development. Significant others refer to people who have an important and lasting emotional bond with an individual, such as parents. According to Rohner (2021), interpersonal rejection can be expressed through four forms: cold and unaffectionate behavior, hostile and aggressive behavior, indifferent and neglectful behavior, and undifferentiated rejection, where individuals feel unloved despite the absence of clear rejecting behaviors. Whether real or perceived, these experiences can lead individuals to feel rejected by significant others. IPARTheory also suggests that parental rejection may arise from conditions that weaken emotional relationships and social support. Family conflict, including divorce, is one factor that increases the risk of perceived parental rejection. Although divorce itself does not directly cause rejection, it may reduce parental emotional availability, which can later be interpreted by children or adolescents as rejection (Rohner, 2021). In this screenplay, Marie perceives rejection from her mother, Lily, following her parents' divorce. Lily's reduced emotional availability and shifting priorities lead Marie to experience cold and unaffectionate, hostile and aggressive, and indifferent and neglectful forms of rejection.

The IPARTheory also consists of sub theories. Personality Sub theory explains how perceived acceptance or rejection, particularly from parents, influences an individual's personality and psychological adjustment. According to Rohner (2021), humans have a universal need to receive love, care, and positive responses from significant others. When these emotional needs are not met, individuals may develop anxiety, emotional insecurity, anger, and resentment. Individuals who experience strong rejection may eventually develop defensive independence, a condition in which they withdraw emotionally and avoid seeking closeness from others despite still needing acceptance and affection. Rejected individuals are also likely to develop impaired self-esteem and self-adequacy, causing them to view themselves negatively and doubt their ability to meet their own needs. Furthermore, rejection may contribute to negative mental representations of oneself and the world, leading individuals to perceive relationships as emotionally unsafe and untrustworthy. One consequence of these negative mental representations is rejection sensitivity, which refers to a tendency to become highly alert to the possibility of rejection, exclusion, or abandonment. Rejection-sensitive individuals often misinterpret others' behaviors as intentional rejection and struggle to trust others emotionally, resulting in fear of intimacy and difficulties in interpersonal relationships. In this screenplay, Marie's perceived rejection from Lily, who serves as both a significant other and attachment figure, contributes to her anxiety, emotional insecurity, defensive independence, rejection sensitivity, and fear of intimacy.

The coping sub theory of IPARTheory explains why some rejected individuals appear to function well despite experiencing perceived rejection (Rohner, 2021, p. 18). It distinguishes affective copers, who maintain good mental health despite rejection, and instrumental copers, who function successfully despite poor mental health (p. 18). Rohner also argues that coping is more likely when individuals have at least one warm and supportive attachment figure (p. 18). However, Marie lacks a stable attachment figure and does not demonstrate either type of coping. Rather than seeking emotional support, her rejection sensitivity and negative worldview lead her to withdraw from others, reflecting defensive independence. Her impaired self-esteem and self-adequacy also interfere with her interpersonal relationships and academic performance. These characteristics indicate that Marie is unable to cope with perceived maternal rejection and experiences the personality changes described in IPARTheory's personality sub theory.

CONCEPT OF THE CREATIVE WORK

Modes of Expression

This creative work uses the dramedy genre to explore serious topics such as divorce, illness, hardship, and emotional pain (Abreu, 2022). As the narrative centers on adolescent mental health, humor is limited to awkward interactions, character contradictions, and situational irony to relieve tension without diminishing the seriousness of the subject. For example, when Daniel playfully attempts to take Marie's phone, she instinctively hides it inside her clothes, creating an awkward moment between them. In contrast, scenes involving Marie's hospitalization, self-neglect, and emotional breakdown are treated with seriousness. This balance prevents the screenplay from becoming overly heavy while remaining emotionally engaging. *Little Miss Sunshine* (2006) and *Dan in Real Life* (2007) serve as references for balancing comedy and emotional conflict.

The screenplay also employs montage and series of shots. Montage combines multiple scenes around a central idea to create comparisons, associations, and contrasts while organizing time and space within the narrative (Xiang et al., 2023, pp. 235–237). Expression montage, particularly comparison montage, contrasts Marie's life before and after moving to Bandung, highlighting her emotional transition from tension in Jakarta to temporary relief in Bandung. For instance, her prolonged hot showers in Jakarta become shorter and more practical after moving away from Lily. Narrative montage, meanwhile, condenses time by linking Marie and Daniel's dates across different locations. The series of shot techniques presents brief continuous shots depicting a single event, as seen in *Euphoria* (2019). Unlike montage, which summarizes multiple events across time, series of shots focuses on one continuous sequence. This technique is used in scenes such as Lily's job rejections, Marie's journey to Bandung, and Nadin's birthday party. Flashbacks are also used to present memories that influence a character's present actions (Turim, 2014, p. 2). In this screenplay, Marie's memories of her dog, Sunshine, remind her of her father, Thomas, following the divorce. The screenplay adopts a bittersweet tone, inspired by *La La Land* (2016), where hope coexists with loss. Likewise, Marie gradually reconciles with Lily despite continuing to face emotional hardships. The primary influence for this creative work is *Lady Bird* (2017), particularly its naturalistic dialogue, bittersweet tone, and portrayal of a complicated mother-daughter relationship. These elements inspire the screenplay's dialogue and emotional conflict. However, unlike a conventional antagonist, Lily's controlling behavior stems from the emotional consequences of divorce rather than malicious intent, making her a more complex and sympathetic character.

Premise and Creative Principle

Months after her parents' divorce, Marie develops an unhealthy relationship with her mother that leads to mental health struggles during her university years. I want to show how an unhealthy mother-daughter relationship impacts a daughter's mental health, personality, and influences her behavior in her relationships.

Synopsis

Months after her parents' divorce, Marie develops an unhealthy relationship with her mother, Lily, whose emotional unavailability leaves her feeling unseen. When Marie is accepted into an art program at a university in Bandung, she sees it as an opportunity to escape her difficult home life and start over. However, Lily repeatedly dismisses the idea, arguing that they cannot afford it. Marie feels frustrated by her mother's constant concerns about money despite her irresponsible spending habits and turns to her father, Thomas, whose affair led to the divorce, for financial support. When Lily discovers Marie has been meeting Thomas behind her back, their relationship worsens. This made Marie more eager to leave as her mother's response made her feel more rejected, unloved, and abandoned. Despite Lily's disapproval, Marie still leaves for Bandung with Thomas' money and begins university.

At first, Marie enjoys her university life, but as her best friend Loren quickly settles into university life and forms new friendships, Marie starts having negative thoughts about Loren, feels left behind, as she distances herself from Loren. As Loren tries to fix their relationship, Marie's negative thoughts fill her mind which eventually breaks their friendship apart. On the other hand, Marie also found her romantic interest, Daniel, whom she met during Nadin's birthday party. However, Marie pulls herself away from Daniel as their relationship starts to get more intimate. Becoming an individual who struggles with mental health, Marie's life gradually falls apart as she has isolated herself from those around her, neglects her well-being, and becomes overwhelmed by her emotional burdens that eventually lead to her hospitalization. When Loren learns that Marie has been hospitalized, she informs Lily, leading both Lily and Thomas to travel to Bandung to visit her. When Marie is hospitalized, Lily realizes Marie's emotional state from a doctor. Lily starts to be more available for Marie, which makes Marie begin to cope. At this moment, Marie and Lily are forced to confront the unresolved issues they had. Though not completely healed, Marie apologizes to Loren and Daniel about their relationship.

Characters

- Marie
Age: 18
Marie was born and raised in the capital city of Jakarta and comes from an upper lower-class family. Marie is an only child in the family. She likes to paint and is majoring in Fine Arts for her university. Marie is reserved, tends to withdraw from people, shy, awkward, and can be defensive. Marie also has a complicated relationship with her mother, Lily. Although unaware, Marie tends to seek warmth from people around her but withdraws every time she receives closeness. Her mental health issues affect her personality and how she views the world as negative. Marie hopes that moving to Bandung will allow her to escape her complicated relationship with Lily and start a new life independently. Throughout the story, she gradually learns to confront her emotional struggles and begins rebuilding her relationship with her mother.
- Lily
Age: 41
Lily is Marie's mother. She was born in Surabaya, but lives in Jakarta after marriage. She has been divorced from her ex-husband, Thomas, for almost a year. She is neat, not afraid to take chances and actions, and has drinking problems. Having spent most of her adult life as a housewife, Lily struggles to adapt to the workforce after her divorce. This financial insecurity causes her to become increasingly concerned about money and appears as unaffectionate and controlling to Marie, though she wants the best for herself. She struggles to express affection openly and often believes that having a secure financial situation is more important than

emotional support. By the end of the narrative, Lily recognizes the impact of her behavior towards Marie and begins to help Marie, such as expressing her care for her.

- **Loren**
Age: 18
Loren has been Marie's friend since high school. She was born and raised in Jakarta. Loren is charming, cheerful, and a social butterfly. She tends to speak before she thinks, sometimes impatient, emotionally unaware, and likes parties and gatherings. Coming from a strict family, Loren hopes to enjoy the freedom of university life after moving away from home. As she builds her own circles of friends in the theatre, Marie feels left out and creates a distance between both of them. Although she cares about Marie, Loren often fails to recognize Marie's emotional needs and unintentionally neglects her feelings. By the end of the story, Loren understands Marie's emotional struggles and accepts her apology.
- **Daniel**
Age: 20
Daniel is Marie's non-committal romantic relationship in college. He majors in Fine Arts, at the same university as Marie, and was born and raised in Bandung. Daniel is charming, confident, but can be immature, tends to speak before he thinks, and is insensitive at times. Daniel wants to build a closer relationship with Marie. However, he struggles to understand emotional reactions and often becomes confused by her inconsistent behavior. Through his relationship with Marie, Daniel serves as a character to show Marie's inconsistency and emotional struggles that affect her ability in maintaining interpersonal relationships.
- **Thomas**
Age: 44
Thomas is Marie's father and Lily's ex-husband. He was born and raised in Jakarta and is a successful architect. Although he is loving and supportive towards Marie, Thomas is unfaithful to Lily. After the divorce which resulted from his affair, he develops an unstructured and unhealthy lifestyle. Although he lives in a luxurious house that is well maintained by his maid who is invested in his personal life, Thomas struggles to take care of himself, making him have changes in his physical appearance. Thomas wants to remain involved in Marie's life despite failing his marriage. Throughout the narrative, Thomas continues to support Marie despite the family's broken relationship.
- **Nadin**
Age: 18
Nadin is Loren's friend from Bandung and is majoring in business as a business student. She is also friends with Marie but not as close as her with Loren. She is friendly, scared of public speaking, but is not scared of trying new things. Nadin genuinely wants to live her life as a student and remains unchanged throughout the story. Although she is friends with Marie, they only grow close for a short period of time. She serves as a character that reflects Marie's inability to maintain new interpersonal relationships unless others take initiative to maintain the connection, in contrast to Marie's relationship with Daniel.

Conflict

This creative work features two types of conflict: Person vs. Self and Person vs. Person (Herrity, 2025). The Person vs. Person conflict occurs between Marie and Lily, whose relationship deteriorates after the divorce. While Marie seeks acceptance and emotional support from her mother, Lily becomes preoccupied with rebuilding her life and is unable to meet Marie's emotional needs. As a result, Marie perceives Lily's behavior as rejection and decides to pursue her dream of studying in Bandung despite her mother's disapproval. This external conflict later develops into a 'Person vs. Self' conflict as Marie struggles with the emotional consequences of perceived rejection, which negatively affect her mental health and ability to maintain healthy interpersonal relationships.

CONCLUSION

This screenplay addresses the first statement of the problem by portraying the development of the unhealthy mother-daughter relationship between Marie and Lily through Lily's emotional unavailability, financial anxiety, and controlling parenting. The screenplay illustrates how Marie perceives these behaviors as rejection through naturalistic dialogue and indirect interactions that lead to the deterioration of their relationship. It also addresses the second statement of the problem by portraying how perceived rejection affects Marie's mental health, personality, and interpersonal relationships with Loren and Daniel. These portrayals reflect the personality sub theory of IPARTheory, which explains how perceived rejection may influence personality development. Finally, the screenplay addresses the third statement of the problem by portraying Marie's gradual ability to cope after Lily begins recognizing her emotional needs during Marie's hospitalization. As Lily becomes a warm attachment figure, Marie can begin her coping process, reflecting the coping sub theory of IPARTheory.

Through this creative work, I gained a deeper understanding of adolescents' vulnerability to mental health issues, the importance of parental relationships, and the concepts presented in IPARTheory. I also learned that perceived rejection depends not only on a parent's behavior but also on how the child interprets that behavior, meaning similar parental actions may produce different emotional outcomes. The creative process also provided valuable experience in applying screenplay techniques such as comparison montage and balancing drama with ethically appropriate humor. This experience may serve as a reference for future creative writers interested in portraying sensitive topics without making them the subject of comedy.

In the future, this creative work will be published digitally through Petra Christian University's repository, Kata Kita. The screenplay may also participate in table reads and script workshops before eventually being submitted to production houses for consideration as a film adaptation, with the aim of reaching a wider audience and raising awareness of adolescent mental health and mother-daughter relationships. For future researchers and creative writers, conducting broader and deeper research from multiple perspectives is recommended to create more realistic characters and nuanced portrayals of family dynamics, adolescent mental health, and interpersonal relationships. A wider range of sources may also help avoid overgeneralization and support more balanced analyses in future creative works.

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