

## **The Plausibility of Severe Social Anxiety in Arthur Radley**

There is evidence to suggest that Arthur Radley may suffer from severe social anxiety disorder. This could have been brought on by his home environment with his father's overwhelming need to keep him out of trouble when he was younger. There are many examples to suggest that Arthur has a strong desire to be part of society but lacks the courage to join. Throughout the book, the reader sees a gradual change in Arthur as he seems to overcome his inability to socialize with the rest of the neighborhood. This gradual overcoming is a common treatment known as "exposure therapy" the "anxiety ladder."

There are many causes of Social Anxiety Disorder. There is reason to believe that Arthur fits into the environmental cause. In an article called "Social Anxiety Disorder: A review of environmental risk factors," Professors Christina Brook and Louis Schmidt of McMaster University describe how over controlling parenting may cause Social Anxiety Disorder in their children (Brook & Schmit 125). When Arthur Radley is introduced in the story, Scout describes how he got mixed up with the wrong crowd as a teen. Arthur and the other boys got into trouble with the law and were locked up. When the judge decided to send them to a state industrial school, Mr. Radley felt that it was basically a prison and wanted Arthur released to him as he would make sure Arthur would stay out of trouble. It seemed that Mr. Radley had a sense of pride and honor in his family with not wanting his son in what he felt was a prison-like school. Mr. Radley is also someone who is bonded by his word, as the Judge seems to know very well. Later on, it is suggested that Mr. Radley should send Arthur to an asylum. Mr. Radley replied "no Radley was going to an asylum" (Lee 13).

After this incident, Arthur is not seen for fifteen years and that is still before Scout and Jem are born. It appears that Mr. Radley was so content on keeping Arthur out of

trouble that he kept him locked up in the house without any social interaction with the outside world. Mr. Radley could have been so controlling over Arthur, it may have changed the way he perceived society outside. It may have also changed his way of thinking and ability to make social decisions. Instead of making decisions based on what he wanted to do, he was probably making decisions based on what his father wanted him to do.

Arthur stabbing his father in the leg could have been a form of acting out from frustration built up over time. There is no other evidence of violent behavior with Arthur up to this point that would suggest his actions would be associated with any other type of mental illness or maybe even developmental disability. It is even suggested that after Mr. Radley passed away, Nathan Radley moves back home to keep Arthur from getting into trouble even though Arthur would be in his late thirties at this time. Nathan fills in the knot in the tree with cement. He says it is to keep the tree from dying, but Scout suggests it is to keep Arthur from giving them little gifts. Scouts view would make sense since the Radley's home is in disrepair and Nathan is more focused on keeping the tree alive.

In various parts of the story, it is suggested that Arthur has a desire to be part of society. Since he has been in isolation for so long without much social interaction, he may not have the basic skills to socialize anymore or he may have a fear of rejection or negative judgement from society. This can be seen in the incident that Stephanie Crawford claims Arthur was peeking in her window at night while she slept. While there is reason to believe that she may be lying, this act would fit the behavior of someone with Social Anxiety. He could be admiring her beauty and have a bit of a crush on her but not have the social skills to express his feelings to her or have a tremendous fear of being embarrassed or rejected. Thus his behavior is perceived as being a bit creepy.

When Arthur stabs his father in the leg, he uses a pair of scissors he was using to cut up newspaper for a scrap book. It is also suggested throughout the book that Arthur was watching the kids out the window. The acts of scrapbooking parts of the newspaper and watching the kids out the window could be signs of his desire to be part of society.

There are many treatments for Social Anxiety Disorder, but the one that is described in the book is the use of the "Anxiety Ladder" or "Exposure Hierarchy" which is a part of

exposure therapy. In an article from the American Physiological Association and the Society of Clinical Society, they describe exposure therapy as “a psychological treatment that was developed to help people confront their fears.” This is a way for the individual to face their fears. Throughout the story, we see a gradual change in Arthur's character. At the beginning, we see a man who does not interact with anyone outside his home. In the end, we see a man who saves two kids from harm and carries Jem home to safety so he can get medical help. Every action is a gradual step to becoming more social. It may have started prior to Jem and Scout with just going out at night, but it becomes more apparent that he is overcoming his disorder with them.

In the beginning, we see that Arthur is active outside of his home during the night, never during the day. This could be because his Dad was asleep and his desire to be part of society drove him to rebel against his Dad's control. It could also be that not many people would be out at night therefore it could be easier for him to go out since there would be minimal social interaction. Whatever the reason, this seems to be the first step on the social ladder where Arthur begins to face his fears.

The items left in the tree go from a piece of gum to some pennies, to some soap carvings, to a pocket watch, something small to something big and of more value. It was assumed that Arthur had fixed Jem's pants and placed them across the fence. This is a small act but another step towards social interaction on the social ladder. In chapter eight, Arthur takes another big step by going out where there is a crowd watching a house on fire to put a blanket on Scout. He doesn't say anything to anyone. The last and most important act of Arthur overcoming his disorder in the story is the attack on Jem and Scout. This is the most important act in the entire story because Arthur thrust himself into a life or death situation. With a situation like this, a person's psychological reaction would be fight, flight, or fright. An individual with social anxiety would not typically respond by fighting. They would respond with the fright reaction or as it's most commonly known as the freeze reaction. They would be so afraid of what is going on that they would not know what to do, though it is not unheard of for them to have a different reaction. Arthur's past as a teen could have developed fighting skills that would have helped in this situation.

Arthur then helps care for Jem by carrying him home to get medical attention. It is at this time that the reader can visualize the real Arthur Radley. He is extremely shy and is led around the house by Scout. Scout is in charge and Arthur follows her. She even tells him that he can pet Jem while he is asleep. When he is on the porch with Scout, he says his first and only sentence in the entire story, "will you take me home?" (Lee 372). Scout describes his tone as being at a whisper "in a voice of a child afraid of the dark" (Lee 372). The tone described by Scout would lead people to believe that Arthur was extremely nervous and was experiencing extreme anxiety. This could be because he just killed a man, he is socializing for the first time, or a combination of both.

## Works Cited

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