

Pathological Narcissism in “The Yellow Wallpaper”

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ABSTRACT

This essay examines pathological narcissism in Charles Gilman Perkins' *The Yellow Wallpaper*. It primarily examines John's actions from the perspective of pathological narcissism. The study describes how John's narcissistic behavior affects the narrator by examining psychological concepts like grandiosity, vulnerability, and lack of empathy. The study looks at how pathological narcissism is reflected in John's controlling demeanor and refusal to comply with his wife's requests. By using the elements of pathological narcissism in a feminist framework, it illustrates how the narrator's identity is silenced by patriarchal authority and narcissistic personality traits, ultimately resulting in her mental breakdown. This essay provides a basic grasp of the connection between gender and narcissism.

Keywords: Pathological Narcissism, Vulnerability, Feminism, Mental Health, Psychological Analysis

Introduction

In recent times, narcissism has been widely spoken of in the research fields of medicine, literature, and psychology. The latter two fields, literature and psychology, have been helping the

medical field to cure people physically and mentally. Narcissism is silently exploring the female's struggles, just like feminism, through its terms. Pathological narcissism is defined as a maladaptive form of narcissism characterized by extreme self-absorption, hypersensitivity to criticism, and impaired interpersonal relationships. While we see this pathological narcissism in literature, it helps to analyze the characters in psychological ways. This research paper analyzes the short story "The Yellow Wallpaper" by Charles Perkins Gilman through the terms of pathological narcissism, a psychological construct characterized by a fragile sense of self, grandiosity, vulnerability, and lack of empathy. From a feminist critique view, it can also portray how pathological narcissist tendencies interact with patriarchal oppression to create psychological collapse.

Charlotte Perkins Gilman, born on July 3, 1860, was an American feminist theorist and writer, notable for her contributions to the women's movement. Raised in poverty due to her father's abandonment, she married artist Charles W. Stetson in 1884 but struggled with domestic life, leading to a severe mental breakdown. After a beneficial trip to California in 1885, she moved there with her daughter in 1888 and divorced her husband in 1894 amid public scandal. In California, she began writing for periodicals, with her story "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1892) standing out for its vivid depiction of a young wife's psychological decline. The selected short story "The Yellow Wallpaper" is analyzed through a psychological lens, focusing specifically on the character's mental health issues as a female with pathological narcissism. The paper analyses the terms of grandiosity, vulnerability, and a lack of sympathy, which contribute to understanding the character's psychological profile and behaviors.

The egotistical susceptibility of the protagonist

An individual's psychological condition is analyzed in relation to pathological narcissism. While grandiosity, vulnerability, and lack of empathy are typical traits of pathological narcissism, its vulnerable subtype is typified by insecurity, hypersensitivity, shame, and fragile self-esteem (Pincus and Lukowwitsky 421). The narcissistic weakness of her husband John is cruelly depicted by the

anonymous narrator. John works as a doctor. After giving birth to his daughter, his wife has a neurological illness. John is practical to the extreme. He has no patience with faith, an intense horror of superstition, and he scoffs openly at any talk of things not to be felt and seen and put down in figures (Gilman 7). He does not treat his wife like a husband, but rather like a doctor. John is a physician, and *perhaps* that is one reason I do not get well faster (Gilman 7). He rents a house, forces her to stay in a room by herself, and separates their newborn from her to treat her nervous problem.

However, she dislikes being in that room. In this case, she feels as though her husband is ignoring her thoughts. She enjoys writing. Thus, this treatment is seen by the narrator as a "rest cure." Men can overcontrol or overproduce women in patriarchal societies, but they are unable to control their thoughts. She makes an image for herself using the wallpaper and begins working on it later, after refusing to ponder and write on her own. "I even said so to John one moonlight evening, but he said what I felt was a draught, and shut the window" (Gilman 8). Thus, she disregards John, whose sensitivity and narcissism are the root causes of her low self-esteem.

Pathological narcissist behavior characterized by a lack of empathy

Most of the time, a person with behavioral disorders can be identified by a lack of empathy for his or her interpersonal relationships. Applying the pathological narcissism theory to the character, John reveals his lack of empathy. He is a physician, and his wife suffers from a nervous disorder because of childbirth. He decides to stay in a rented house and remove the infant from the mother to treat the problem. During the day, he goes to work without empathy for the narrator's feelings. The narrator says, he takes all care from me, and so I feel basely ungrateful not to value it more (Giman 9). He doesn't comprehend how she feels about staying here without her baby and husband. This scene demonstrates his lack of empathy. The narrator says that John does not know how much she really suffers. He knows there is no reason to suffer, and that satisfies him. Of course it is only nervousness. It does weigh on

me so not to do my duty in any way! I meant to be such a help to John, such a real rest and comfort, and here I am a comparative burden already! (Gilman 10).

The incapacity to empathize with others is a sign of pathological narcissism. John's actions toward his wife demonstrate that. She wants to visit her newborn, write, and participate in social activities. She expresses that he hates to have me write a word (Gilman 9). However, John consistently disregards her desires. Instead of trying to understand her mentality, he only concentrates on treating her medical condition. He simply grins and refers to her as a "little girl" regardless of what she wants from him. It is very typical in family relationships to refer to his lover as a tiny girl. However, it also emphasizes how he is a domineering person who undervalues her desires. Therefore, research on pathological narcissism is highly prevalent in patriarchal societies, where men typically lack the capacity to exhibit empathy for their relationships by controlling and making fun of their wives.

The narrator becomes enraged as her husband consistently rejects her. She begins staring at the yellow wallpaper in her room because of being rejected. She becomes impatient trying to explain her mental disorder to her husband, John. Grandiose narcissism is characterized by arrogance, self-focused and self-aggrandizing behaviour, grandiose fantasy, dominance, vindictiveness, self-sacrificing self-enhancement, devaluation of others, an inability to be sensitive to the concerns and social constraints of others, as well as a willingness to exploit them for personal gain (Pincus 421). John's behavior is characterized by pathological features that lead to mental illness, including grandiosity, vulnerability, and a lack of empathy. Thus, in a patriarchal culture, feminism exhibits the characteristics of pathological narcissism.

Conclusion

The literary text of "The Yellow Wallpaper" is studied in terms of pathological narcissistic qualities of grandiosity, emotional fragility and a lack of empathy through John's personality. He hopes that his dominant authority both as husband and physician would cure his wife's physical and emotional

problems. But mistakenly, his dominating power and rejections progressively make the narrator lose her sense of self and drives her to mental illness. This paper analyses how narcissistic behaviour reveals patriarchal culture in a feminist manner. By combining psychology theory with feminism, this paper shows pathological narcissism is highly presented into the complex relationship between power, identity and mental health in the text.

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