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Adolf Hitler's Pathological Narcissistic Personality Disorder in *Mein Kampf*

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ABSTRACT

Given the argument that an autobiography can be deconstructed like any other fictional texts, this article analyzes *Mein Kampf* (1939), an autobiography written by Adolf Hitler by treating the text as a fiction. Doing so reveals Adolf Hitler the character, who is very influenced by Adolf Hitler the writer. With the use of Otto F. Kernberg's (2004) theory on pathological narcissistic personality disorder, this article attempts to find Adolf Hitler the character's narcissistic personality disorder inside of *Mein Kampf* and the reasons for such personality disorder. The investigation reveals that the symptoms of the character's narcissism can be found in the character's self, emotional life, and social functioning which fit into Kernberg's (2004) description of a narcissistic patient. On the other hand, the character's authoritarian parental figure and innate talents are the reasons for the personality disorder.

Keywords: autobiography; narcissism; adolf hitler; mein kampf

INTRODUCTION

Despite the long history that an autobiography had, few scholars took little interests in analyzing this genre, at least, not before the era of deconstruction. It was neglected for more than half a century, jumbled around between departments of history and literature for most part of the 20th century. Initially, autobiography was used as a historical evidence. However, with more and more historians doing their own research, it is becoming clear that autobiography lacks accuracy and is very subjective to serve as a historical evidence (Berryman, 1999). It was in the era of structuralism and deconstruction that the critical study of autobiography began to be taken seriously. In his journal, Paul Jay (1987) outline three critics who suggest deconstructing autobiography. By doing so, autobiography began to lose its historical usefulness and began making a way into creative literature.

When it comes to the authors of autobiography, the lists are endless. Many famous people such as Nelson Mandela and Barrack Obama have written their autobiography which then serve as inspirations for other people. Another person who also had written his autobiography was the world's most renowned dictator, Adolf Hitler. However, instead of inspiring people by his autobiography, his work was once banned in several countries. *Mein Kampf*, or translated as My Struggle in English, tells the story of Adolf Hitler that he wrote during the time he was imprisoned for a failed putsch in Munich, 1923. In 1925, the first volume of this book is published followed by the second volume in 1926. The book tells a little bit of Adolf Hitler's childhood and consists mostly of his plans and struggles to make Germany glorious. This autobiography, as real as Hitler may wanted it to be, was made clear by other biographies such as *The Mind of Adolf Hitler* written by Walter C. Langer (1972). For instance, in *Mein Kampf*, there is a story of when Adolf Hitler was hit by a smoke bomb, but with Langer's research, it seems like the incident likely did not happen.

Those discrepancies are not unusual considering how autobiography was said to create multiple contradictory self-images of the writer (Berryman, 1999). Thus, these differences of the real-life events as well as the events written inside of *Mein Kampf* inspired me to analyze *Mein Kampf* like one would do with any other fictional texts and deconstruct it. Doing so creates two personas of Adolf Hitler: Adolf Hitler the writer and Adolf Hitler the character. These two personas are

related in a way that the real life of Adolf Hitler the writer will have a huge impact on Adolf Hitler the character, including Hitler the writer's mental state.

The topic surrounding Adolf Hitler the writer's mental state has been a subject of interest for so many psychologists as well as psychoanalysts. There are research after research trying to find the state of the writer's mental health that might make him become the world's infamous dictator. For instance, during the second world war, the USA's Office of Strategic Services cooperated with a team of psychoanalysts just to find the writer's mental state. The research was documented by the team's leader, Walter C. Langer (1972) in his book, the Mind of Adolf Hitler: The Secret Wartime Reports. Langer's collaborators agreed that Hitler was a neurotic psychopath bordering on schizophrenia with messiah complex, masochistic tendencies, strong sexual perversions and likely a homosexual (Langer, 1972). Another instance of similar research was conducted by Frederik L. Coolidge and his team where they found the writer to suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), psychotic thinking, schizophrenia, paranoid personality disorder, antisocial personality disorder, narcissistic personality disorder, and sadistic personality disorder (Coolidge et al., 2007, p. 40-42).

Among all personality disorders the writer was diagnosed with, narcissistic personality disorder piqued my interest since it is the word that has been used by a lot of people around me. It was an overused term given to anyone that an individual might have disliked. Famous people such as the Kardashians and Beyoncé were called narcissistic before (Dombek, 2016). This shows that the term narcissist or narcissism is not regarded seriously. However, when one reads *Mein Kampf*, there seems to be a lot of indicators pointing to Adolf Hitler the character suffering from narcissistic personality disorder. Readers got to see how the character Adolf Hitler thinks and acts in a way that nauseating (Chilton, 2015, p. 19). Narcissism plays a huge role in the character's journey, showing that narcissistic personality disorder is still a mental disorder which is as serious as other mental disorders. Hence, this research will be focused in analyzing the symptoms of narcissistic personality disorder the character portrays in *Mein Kampf* as well as the reason for such disorder in the hope to raise awareness for the seriousness of narcissistic personality disorder.

ANALYSIS

The Character's Symptoms of Narcissistic Personality Disorder

Kernberg (2004) noted that the symptoms of a narcissist's narcissism can be found in the narcissist's self, emotional life, and social functioning. They usually have inflated self-concepts which contradicts their real self that is full of insecurities. Their emotional life is described as low and shallow, with the presence of chronic envy inside. Those low and shallow emotional life eventually caused narcissist's frequent ruthless and exploitative behaviors. Finally, narcissists might have what is called a good social interaction, which is surprising considering the lack of their interpersonal relationship with others.

The Character's Self

Even though Kernberg (2004) might have elaborated on the descriptions of a narcissist's self, he did not really explain what the self really means except that it is "an intrapsychic structure consisting of multiple self-representations and their related affect dispositions." (Kernberg, 2004, p. 315). This definition alone is insufficient for a complete analysis of the character's self. Thus, I have found another definition of the self, which is "The totality of you, including your body, your sense of identity, your reputation (how others know you), and so on. It encompasses both the physical self and the self that is constructed out of meanings." (Baumeister, 1999, p. 247). Both definitions deal with the construction of meaning one gives for him or herself, which can be referred to as self-concept. Therefore, to find the character's self, it is necessary to look at the character's self-concept.

To do so, I will use Jan E. Stets and Peter J. Burke's (2000) summary of using social identity theory as well as identity theory of the self to move forward toward a general theory of the self. This theory suggests that the self can be derived from who an individual think he or she is in his associated group (Stets and Burke, 2000). Putting this theory into practice, it is important to find who the character associated himself in. The answer to that is unsurprisingly, the Germans. He took a lot of pride in being a German even when he technically was an Austrian. In the first chapter of the book, the character told the story where he participated in wearing a German attire and saluting the German way as expression of his loyalty. Then, the next question is what role the character think he held as a part of that group.

In the earlier chapters of the book, the character made it seem that all he had ever wanted was to be an architect. In his words, "I hoped that one day I might be able to make my mark as an architect..." (Hitler, 1939, p. 107). It was like the character merely thought himself just like any other Germans. However, when reading *Mein Kampf*, it is hard not to notice the word 'fate' or 'destiny'. In fact, the book was opened with, "It has turned out fortunate for me today that **destiny** [my emphasis] appointed Braunau-on-the-Inn to be my birthplace." (Hitler, 1939, p. 1). The same 'fate' was also the reason why the character took a detour in Chapter Seven of the first volume from his original dream of being an architect to take up political works, "For my part I then decided that I would take up political work." (Hitler, 1939, p. 166). This statement is then followed by Chapter Eight of the first volume titled *The Beginning of My Political Activities*. The reason behind such detour is interesting, it is because for him, no one can bring changes to Germany. This is where the character's self-concept becomes clear, which is the savior of Germany.

Yet, it might be his self-concept is not as simple as being the savior of Germany. Other than 'fate', the character seems to use the word 'Providence' a lot. The consistency of the words the character use is also interesting. It seems like 'fate' or 'destiny' gave him harsh lessons of life for him to learn. While 'Providence' has the ability of gifting and choose the best leaders. It is as if the character believe he is fated to undergo a mission of being Germany's savior under some sort of Providential guidance. Another word that the character like to use is 'God', and this word made the meaning of savior went into religious directions. The character's use of 'God' is mainly to defend his hatred for the Jews, saying that by standing against the Jews, he is defending the work of God (Hitler, 1939, p. 61). Also, in the book, the character often uses religious contexts, making it more and more clear that the character regards himself as a Messiah.

By regarding himself as a Messiah, it is not a surprise that the character fit into what Kernberg described as having an inflated self-concept. In the book, the character also repeatedly criticized numbers of people even among the Aryans who he said were the highest images of God among His creatures (Hitler, 1939, p. 298). Also similar to Kernberg's (2004) description of the extreme contradictions a narcissistic possess in their self-concept (which is full of greatness) with their real self (which is full of inferiority and insecurity) (Kernberg, 2004), Hitler the character also has this tendency. However, since it is highly unlikely for a person with such inflated self-concept to wrote about his own weakness or insecurity, it is needed to look at the real life of the writer. Like the character, several of Hitler's associates had testify that the writer also believed in his own greatness. He liked to repeat to his associates that he is the greatest of all human beings (Langer, 1972, p. 38). Yet, behind those greatness lies a vulnerable man with lots of insecurities and fears. The writer was prescribed different kinds of pills and tranquilizers because he was said to be afraid of obesity, impotency, death, and many more (Langer, 1972).

Seeing the contrast of the character and the real-life writer makes me think that perhaps the character is the writer's self-concept, and the writer is the real self of the character. The character

might also possess what Kernberg (2004) described as a "pseudosublimatory potential", which is the capacity for active work in some areas but then surprises others with the banality of their development (Kernberg, 2004, p. 229). It is no surprise that the character is a genius, despite all his shortcomings he did manage to bring Germany to its glory in the second world war. However, the one hole in his story was being rejected by Vienna's School of Arts despite him having the talents in drawing he described because of cruel fate. In *Mein Kampf*, the character did not explain that in real life, he got rejected twice from the same school (Langer, 1972). With the talents the character claimed had, it does not make sense that he would get rejected twice. The real life writer was also said to spend his free time painting and slacking around, refusing to find work or improving himself at school even at the point of starvation, meaning his earlier suffering in Vienna was not necessary if he had only tried. After his rise in power, the writer was still described by him associates as unable to focus on meetings and constantly procrastinating, choosing to go to his private theatres instead of meetings (Hamann, 2011; Langer, 1972).

Hitler's Emotional Life

Emotional life is the summary of emotions one felt in their lives. This definition derives from Malabou's (2013) definition of an emotion, which is the differences of what one feels through their relationship with others (Malabou, 2013, p. 5). In connection with Kernberg's (2004) theory, he first described the presence of envy as the major characteristic of a narcissist's emotional life (Kernberg, 2004, p. 264). In the previous section, I have briefly mentioned the presence of inferiority in a narcissist. Envy, on the other hand, happens because of a painful perception of inferiority which serves as a defense against an unflattering comparison that threaten the self-esteem (Smith, 2004, p. 1). For narcissistic patients who never wanted to recognize their inferiority and always strives for superiority, the presence of chronic envy is understandable.

However, locating the presence of such envy is a much more difficult thing to do since the main characteristic of envy is that it is often impossible to recognize, even for the beholder himself (Farber, 1966, p. 36, as cited in Smith, 2004). The only way to do so is to look at another main characteristic of envy, which is hostility. For an emotion to be called envy, it needs to have hostile components (Smith, 2004). Thus, to find the character's enviousness, it is as simply as looking at the character's subject of hostility, which are the Jews. The Jews were the character's scapegoat for everything wrong and this happened because of the character's realization of the Jews' activities in cultural life that happened in the second chapter of *Mein Kampf's* first volume.

Cultural life is the key point of the character's hatred for the Jews. It is not a surprise that the character put a high value in cultural life, after all, his dream was to be a painter but failed after being rejected by Vienna's School of Academic Arts. Perhaps the recognition of the Jews' domination in cultural life triggers the character's inferiority, which then unfolds into envy. Another thing worth mentioning was that before the character's realization of the Jews' domination in cultural life, he admired the World Press newspaper which was managed by the Jews but then changed his mind and began to find faults in World Press after the realization. This shows that the problem is not the Jews, it is the character's envy.

Second, Kernberg (2004) described narcissistic patient's emotional life as having a low and shallow emotional life, which means the patient can only feel some kind of emotions and not all. They are described to have a serious deficiency of love and empathy along with feelings of boredom and emptiness, as well as continuous search of greatness and superiority (Kernberg, 2004, p. 264). Again, as I have mentioned before in real life, the writer is different from the ambitious character in *Mein Kampf*. Where in *Mein Kampf*, the character worked hard to achieve his dream of becoming a painter, in real life, the writer is said that for over a year before his mother died, did nothing except lie around or occasionally paint a few watercolors (Langer, 1972, p. 78). This discrepancy shows Hitler's boredom, which he fantasizes to be a search for success in *Mein Kampf*.

Empathy itself is the thoughts and feelings of an individual in response to the observed emotional experiences of another (Olderbak et al, 2014, p.1). In *Mein Kampf*, the only instance where the character seemingly understood the feelings of others was the hatred of the protestors (Hitler, 1939, p.58), which is not considered as an empathic understanding for its lack of respectful and positive nature. In another case where the character gave an illustration of a family with an alcoholic and abusive father, he said that the family were simply unhappy victims of evil circumstances and even blamed them for their misfortune. After blaming them, he degraded those people in misfortune, regarding them not as human beings but as lamentable results of lamentable laws (Hitler, 1939, p. 35). The character's ability of only understanding hatred but not empathy is not surprising considering Kernberg (2004) also described a narcissist's inability to feel compassion and love and instead, replaced by feelings of hatred (Kernberg, 2004, p. 246).

Finally, Kernberg (2004) described the presence of uncertainty and dissatisfaction of the individual as well as conscious or unconscious exploitative and ruthlessness toward others as a characteristic of a narcissist's emotional life (Kernberg, 2004, p. 264). In *Mein Kampf*, it seems like the character's ruthlessness was an attempt to hide his uncertainty and dissatisfaction of himself. Again, the character never mentioned anything regarding his uncertainty nor dissatisfaction, but from his idea of the perfect leader, he repeatedly stressed the importance of not showing any weaknesses for it would cause protest among the people (Hitler, 1939, p. 67). Thus, his *Weltanschauung* or world view in English (Lee, 2004) for the perfect civilization always contain ruthless methods (Hitler, 1939, p. 142). His *Weltanschauung* also consist of exploiting everyone not Germans which he called inferior to serve as slaves for the Aryans (Hitler, 1939, p. 230). Moreover, his ruthless and exploitative nature can truly be seen in the world's most saddening history, the holocaust.

The Character's Social Functioning

The last category of a narcissist is in the individual's social functioning, in which Kernberg (2004) described the patients to have a good ability in their social interactions but present a remarkable lack of interpersonal relationship (Kernberg, 2004, p. 228). Social interactions can be defined as social roles in work environments while interpersonal relationship is intimate relationship with others (Bosc, 2000). This discrepancy happens because a narcissist needs adoration from others the most but is unable to depend on anybody due to their deep distrust and depreciation of others (Kernberg, 2004, p. 228). Thus, narcissists are often seen in the center of things, efficiently extracting 'narcissistic supplies' while protecting themselves from more meaningful emotional interactions (Kernberg, 2004, p. 248). The patient's constant depreciation of others also caused their relationship with others to be parasitic, in which the narcissist constantly uses others for his own gain, then throw the person away after.

As an autobiography, it is bewildering that *Mein Kampf* does not contain any instances of the character's personal relationship with others. I do not mean the character's rare admiration of others or the character's diplomatic relationship, but the depth of the character's relationship with others. He did mention loving his parents and "intimate comrades" (Hitler, 1939, p. 144) here and there, but never mentioned who the comrades are as well as the extent of their relationship. Even after looking at the life of the writer, there are no information I could find which elaborate on the writer's relationship with others. There is one individual, Heinrich Hoffman (2012), who wrote a book titled *Hitler was My Friend*. Yet again, it only tells the story from Hoffman's point of view but not Hitler's.

In the character's description of his Weltanschauung of the ideal Germany, it might seem like the character depends a lot on the power of the broad masses, causing him to master the art of

propaganda for the purpose of winning the masses. However, the character made it clear that his policy "[M]ust not serve the mass but rather dominate them" (Hitler, 1939, p. 361). This means the mass need to depend on the State and not the other way around. For someone who uses the broad mass as his major plan, one would think he would regard the mass highly or at least not deprecatory. Yet again, the character said that the only thing good about the masses is the mass itself while also mentioning the mass' stupidity (Hitler, 1939, p. 148).

Alongside a narcissist's lack of interpersonal relationship, Kernberg (2004) also mentioned 'narcissistic supplies' (Kernberg, 2004, p. 248) which a narcissist need. It is "[A] form of payment given by others in order to be in a relationship with a narcissist." (Stines, 2019, para. 4). It can come in the form of attention, compliments, feeling powerful, etc (Stines, 2019). Reviewing back to the character and the masses, it seems like the broad masses are the supplies of the character's narcissistic need to be the greatest.

When one talks about having a good social interaction, the character is a perfect example of having one. In several instances, the character mentioned attending several meetings for the sake of the Nationalist Socialist Party at least once a month, even traveling across Germany for such meetings. Similar to Kernberg's description, in those meetings the character loved to be in the center of attention. More than often the character mentioned his frequency of being the speaker in those meetings as well as him being proud of himself for the applause given to him. Another interesting meeting is the meeting that the character held in Krone Circus Hall. That particular meeting is by no means a safe one, the character already mentioned the possibility of violence and bloodshed, and yet, the character is more afraid of being ridiculed for not gaining enough audience more than his own life. Even after the meeting ended up successful, what he is proud of is not being able to keep the meeting safe, but the applause he was given. This shows that he values his narcissistic supplies more than his own life.

A narcissist is also said to have a parasitic relationship with other people and that for the narcissist, other people seemingly have something that the narcissistic can take from, especially narcissistic supply, then throw the people away after gaining what he or she wanted (Kernberg, 2004). Before going forward with the analysis, it is important to note that the character had always been an individualist. In Chapter Eight of the second volume, he explained that Germany should only have one movement, the Nationalist-Socialist movement and that allies will make the country weaker. Yet, his future plans for Germany and *Weltanschauung* included alliancing with England and Italy. This might be caused from the power of England and Italy during the time *Mein Kampf* was written, when those two countries were Europe's conqueror. With the addition of a narcissist's ability to adapt to unfavorable environments (Kernberg, 2004), the character saw so many potentials and benefits for Germany by alliancing with those countries. Yet, for his goal to be the only ultimate power in the world, one cannot say for sure that after the character reaches his goal he will not turn back on his words.

Reasons for the Narcissistic Personality Disorder

According to Kernberg (2004) the reason for someone developing narcissistic personality disorder is caused by the combination of a chronically cold parental figure as well as innate talents that narcissists tend to possess. Those innate talents then become refuge against the aggression received from the narcissists' parents.

Parental Figure

Kernberg (2004) mentioned "Chronically cold parental figure with covert but intense aggression" (Kernberg, 2004, p.234) as the common background for narcissistic patients and the mental disorder is a defense mechanism against the aggression given by the parents. Their main characteristic, the devaluation of other people, is the rationalization of their disappointments toward their parents. In other words, a narcissist usually has a parent or parents that are strict,

unloving, and even hostile, hence, the child has no ideal object to internalize or serve as a stable core for self-regard. Such description given by Kernberg (2004) is very similar to what is usually called an authoritarian parenting style, which can be defined as strict and stern, insisting on unquestioning obedience, and enforces good behaviors through threats, shaming, and other punishments. It is a style associated with less parental warmth and responsiveness (Dewar, 2017; Baumrind, 1991).

In the first chapter of *Mein Kampf*, the character briefly mentioned his father as a man full of pride and expectation for his son (Hitler, 1939, pp. 19-20). Moreover, the character also mentioned his frequent disputes with his father which are mainly caused from the character wanting to pursue his dream of becoming a painter while his father wanted the character to be a civil servant. For instance, "[A]t that [his father disapproval of the character's dream] our struggle became stalemate. The father would not abandon his 'Never' and I became all the more consolidated in my 'Nevertheless'." (Hitler, 1939, p. 21). From the description inside *Mein Kampf*, claiming that his father adopted the authoritarian parenting style seems too far-fetched. Afterall, authoritarian parenting style needs to be accompanied by punitive punishments.

However, what the character described of his father in *Mein Kampf* is only the tip of the iceberg. Alois Hitler, Adolf Hitler's father, was an abusive father whose object of violence is Adolf. According to Adolf's younger sister Paula, it is Adolf who constantly challenged their father to extreme harshness, then received extreme beating and whipping. At one instance, he even decided to run away from home and once he was caught, Alois laughed at Adolf's state and then calling him the 'toga boy'. This ridicule hurt Adolf more than anything and it would eventually take him a lot of time to get over this episode (Toland, 1992). From this, it can be said that the character was raised by an authoritarian parent. Kernberg (2004) did mention that usually the one who possess such authoritarian parenting style is the mother and not the father. Adolf's mother is always described as someone kind-hearted and loving.

To answer this discrepancy, it is necessary to remember that Kernberg only mentioned 'often', which does not close the possibility of the father figure from having such parenting style. Baumrind (1966) also suggests that "[T]here is some evidence that parental punitiveness, especially in working-class families, is associated with more severe disturbance in the child than maternal punitiveness, perhaps because techniques used by the father —and the working-class father in particular—are harsher." (Baumrind, 1966, p. 896). Thus, it can be concluded that the character's father authoritarian figure alone is the trigger for the character's personality disorder.

Innate Talents

In the previous section I have mentioned how the character's father plays a role in the development of the character's narcissism. His father's authoritarian figure alone does not make a narcissist, if not accompanied by the presence of innate talents that becomes a refuge for these narcissists against the father's aggression (Kernberg, 2004). Looking at the character's life, it is likely that the character might be talented in drawing at some point of his life because his parents did put him into a Realschule that is focused on art, but not the kind of talent that would make him a prodigy like he had claimed. This 'talent' of his might also be the refuge against his father's authoritarian behavior. Whenever his father punished him for not following his father's demands, he never gave up on his dreams of being a painter. It shows that the reason the character bears all of his father's punishments it is the price he had to pay for his dreams. In another sense, his dream that stems from his belief in his talent is his refuge against his father's aggression.

Apparently, the character is also special in a way that he was his mother's savior. Klara Hitler gave birth to Hitler after the death of his previous three children, making her dote on Hitler the

most and even spoiled him. It is noted by Adolf's relative that Klara always takes Adolf's side (Toland, 1992). For Klara, Adolf might seem like a 'gift' from God that saves her from the heartbreak of losing her children. It is also said that Klara decided not to get pregnant again until Adolf was five to take care of him. This earlier period of Adolf's life might be the happiest period of his life, him receiving the lavish love from his mother and not the abuse from his father. Thus, with his father's aggression, he had no choice but to take refuge in his role as his mother's savior (Langer, 1972; Toland, 1992) until adulthood and the rest is history.

CONCLUSION

By using Kernberg's (2004) theory as a framework, this research shows that the character suffers from pathological narcissistic disorder as well as the reason for such disorder, I have discussed that the character's narcissistic symptoms can be found from his self, emotional life, as well as his social functioning. Similar to narcissists, the character had a inflated self-concept by regarding himself as the greatest and the Messiah, contrasting his real self, which is full of insecurities. The character also had an emotional life which has an envious nature, especially to the Jews. He also had what Kernberg (2004) called a low and shallow emotional life, causing him to understand only the other's hatred but not love and his ruthless as well as exploitative behaviors towards other. There seems to be no instance of the character's personal relationship with anyone, but he did possess a good social interaction proven by his constant appearance on meetings. In all accounts of his meetings however, it seems like the character only cares about extracting his narcissistic supplies more than his own life.

There are two reasons for his narcissistic personality. First is his authoritarian father who constantly punished him with punitive methods, causing him to defend himself from such aggression. Second, his innate talent of painting as well as his earlier years of life when he was his mother's savior are his refuge from his father's aggression. These two reasons then become the triggers for the development of his pathological narcissistic personality disorder.

From this research, it shows that an autobiography can be deconstructed and analyzed like any other fictional works. There are a lot of discrepancies from what is written inside of *Mein Kampf* and the real life, showing that an autobiography might be as fiction as other fictional works. Thus, this method of deconstructing non-fictional work such as autobiography is open for other research. Finally, it is important to remember that the character's narcissistic personality disorder might be the reason of the character's vileness and understanding the reason behind it makes everything ironic. I cannot help but wonder who is to blame for the development of such disorder. Saying that, I do not mean to justify the character's thoughts and actions. What the character did is vile and unethical, narcissistic personality disorder does not justify such behaviors. However, it is best to remember that narcissistic personality disorder is a serious disorder and thus, should not be regarded as something simple.

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