



Article

The Relationship Between Narcissistic Personality and Violent Behavior as Represented in William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*

Mahwa Said¹, Gindho Rizano²^{1,2}English Department, Faculty of Humanities, Andalas University, Padang, 25122, Indonesia**SUBMISSION TRACK**

Received: November, 25 2019
 Final Revision: Februari, 15, 2020
 Available Online: March 25, 2020

KEYWORD

Narcissistic Personality Disorder, Ego Defense
 Mechanisms, Violent Behaviour, Psychoanalysis

CORRESPONDENCE

E-mail: mahwasaid.student.sasingunand@gmail.com

A B S T R A C T

This thesis explores the violent behaviour illustrated in William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*. It focuses on the antagonist's Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD) in order to reveal the motives behind his violent behaviour. The writers apply psychoanalytical theory and brings in contemporary theories by experts in psychology in order to help better understand the psychological problems in the novel. The writers conclude that NPD and violent behaviour of the antagonist are ultimate interlinked.

INTRODUCTION

Many critics see Golding's classic as a work that offers a bleak view of human nature. It illustrates the innate evil of human nature and represents what terrible deeds humans are capable of doing (Singh, 2015). This is something that one can clearly observe from the personality and behavior of the character named Jack Merridew. He exhibits violent behavior that requires explanation which modern psychology may readily provide. This article will illustrate how Narcissistic Personality Disorder (also referred to as NPD) is the root of Jack's violent behavior.

The term Narcissistic Personality Disorder itself is originated from Greek mythology 'Narcissus'. According to the myth, Narcissus was a handsome and proud young man. Upon seeing his reflection on the water for the first time, he became so enamored that he could not stop gazing at his own image. He remained at the water's edge until he eventually wasted to death (Tyminski, 2016).

Cattell defines personality as how we tend

to behave and what we are like as a person. Personality is the way of thinking, feeling and behaving that makes a person different from other people. An individual's personality is influenced by experiences, environment (surroundings, life situations) and inherited characteristics (qtd. in Cloninger, 2009). A personality disorder is a deviation in a human's personality that betrays the custom of society, causing problems and lasting over time. ("What are Personality Disorder?"). According to Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD) is characterized by a long-standing pattern of grandiosity, an overwhelming need for admiration, and usually a complete lack of empathy toward others. People with this disorder often believe they are of primary importance in everybody's life or a sense of entitlement. (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

Krug et al. describes violent behavior as any behavior that causes harm or injuries to others verbally or physically. As shown in the novel, violent behavior threatens social boundaries and

can lead to breakdowns in relationships (Hamby, 2017). Violence can also be categorized according to its motivation: 1) Reactive or emotional violence involving the expression of anger, a hostile desire to hurt someone. It comes in response to a perceived provocation. 2) Proactive or instrumental violence is the calculated one and is often performed intentionally and aimed for some reward. (Jacquin, 2017).

Sigmund Freud proposes three premises related to human psyche: 1) most individual's mental process are unconscious, 2) all human behavior is motivated by libido or sexual energy, and 3) the power of social taboos, which are attached to certain sexual impulses, causes many of our desires and memories repressed into the unconscious. He further explains the three zones of human's mind, which are the id (pleasure principle), Ego (the governing agency), Superego (moral censoring agency) (Guerin, 2005).

Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory of personality argues that human behavior is the result of the interactions among three component parts of the mind: the id, ego, and superego. According to Freud, behavior is motivated by internal or psychological forces, and abnormality is caused by an imbalance in the internal forces that motivate behavior. In short, Freud's theory will help the writer in seeing the motivations, thought, and feelings behind the character Jack Merridew's behavior.

In analyzing Narcissistic Personality Disorder represented in the novel the writers apply the theory proposed by American Psychiatric Association in their book: Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders fifth edition (2013).

Brummelman et al. (2015) argue that the information of the exact origin of NPD is insufficient (1), so the writer will only try to speculate the origin of Jack Merridew's NPD. Meanwhile, American Psychiatric Association suggests that narcissistic personality disorder causes significant impairments in personality in terms of functioning and is accompanied by a number of pathological personality features. There are several features of narcissistic personality disorder, such as 1) viewing oneself as the most important, 2) fantasizing about having immense power and brilliance, 3) believing

oneself to be 'special', 4) hungry for attention, 5) feeling privileged, 6) is exploitative, 7) lacking empathy, 8) is often envious, 9) showing arrogant behaviors or attitudes. (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

To reveal the link between NPD and violent behavior the writer leans on theories proposed by different experts. The first one is Bardenstein that argues that violent behaviour of individuals with NPD is due to their ego being impaired. It means that they have poor ability to connect with or to feel empathy toward other people, to recognize that others also have feeling and thought like themselves (2013).

The second theory is by Louis B. Schlesinger. In his article Schlesinger reviewed case reports on criminal activities that involve violence and theories regarding their link to NPD. He explains that many crimes involving violent behaviour were based on Narcissism. Schlesinger argued that narcissism can be traced to the psychology of serial killers. The violence done by Narcissistic individuals are rooted from the internal pressure to do so. It is because of the sense of complete control he got from overpowering his victim, describes Schlesinger.

The third theory proposed by Twenge et al. (2003). In their article the authors focused their research on the case of Columbine school shooting. They analysed what brought the perpetrators to commit such violent act. They theorized that it was due to external factors, such as social rejection.

Many researchers had analyzed Lord of the Flies in different approach (Anoosheh, 2018; Singh, 2015; Danni, 2015; Bufkin, 1965). The writers notice the link between Narcissistic Personality Disorder and violent behavior of a character named Jack Merridew. Jack lives in a condition without parental control. He also undergoes stressful experiences such as war, plane crash, being marooned on an island, as well as humiliating experiences, for instance not getting the approval of his peers and being rejected by them. Jack's actions get progressively violent worsen his stay on the island and this requires explanation. The writers assume that Jack Merridew's Narcissistic Personality Disorder has influence over his violent behavior

The current research focuses on the analysis of the

personality of Jack Merridew. This includes his violent behavior and the Narcissistic Personality Disorder symptoms he exhibits. Moreover, the research also aims at revealing the connection between these two factors.

RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

This chapter explores the Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD) suffered by Jack Merridew and how they correlate to the violence and atrocities occurred on the island. The story begins when the boys are already on the island, so Jack's previous life before the island is not illustrated, although there are some clues in the story that let the writers deduce about the origin of his NPD. The writer first tries to reveal his NPD origin and further explore his narcissistic traits in order to analyse the relationship between NPD and violent behaviour done by Jack.

The Origin of Jack's Narcissistic Personality Disorder In The Novel

Otto Kernberg views NPD as rooted in the child's defense against cold parents, usually the mother. (Brummelman et al, 2015). Emotionally hungry and angry at the depriving parents, the child withdraws into a part of the self that the parents value, whether looks, intellectual ability, or some other skill or talent. This part of the self becomes inflated and grandiose. Any perceived weaknesses are "split off" into a hidden part of the self. Splitting gives rise to a lifelong tendency to swing between extremes of grandiosity and feelings of emptiness and worthlessness.

The war in LOTF is a reference to World War II which lasted for 6 years. In the novel Jack was about 14 years old so we can estimate that he has experienced the war for at least 4 years. According to Freud as described in Bleiberg's article Normal and Pathological Narcissism in Adolescence (1994) in a traumatic experience the ego is rendered passive by "the subject's estimation of his own strength compared to the magnitude of the danger and his admission of helplessness". Freud describes that the ego tends to attempt to gain mastery over such passivity and helplessness. Freud believes that the tendency is crucial to advancing "the individual's most basic narcissistic pursuits, that is, the capacity for self-preservation" (Bleiberg, 1994). According to Kernberg's and Freud's statements it could be

argued that the lack of parental love and the trauma from war caused Jack to develop a narcissistic personality as his ego defense against the feeling of helplessness and worthlessness, and as his ego's attempt to gain the feeling of mastery over such feelings, needed by him in order to keep going in life.

Jack's Narcissistic Personality Disorder In The Novel

According to the DSM-V, the first criteria for NPD is that the individual have a "grandiose sense of self-importance" (American Psychiatrists Association, 2013). It can be seen in Jack in how he overestimates his ability and is boastful about being a choir leader and can sing better, as the reason why he should be the chief. "I ought to be chief," said Jack with simple arrogance, "because I'm chapter chorister and head boy. I can sing C sharp" (Golding, 1954: 16). This line shows quite a lot about Jack's personality. It shows his grandiose sense of self-importance and sense of entitlement by him exaggerating his achievements and expecting others agree with his demand. Jack has a sense of entitlement and he lacks empathy. Both of these traits combined makes him sort of exploitative, as can be seen in how he forces his choir to "stand still" under the heat just after they crash-landed (Golding, 1954: 15). This scene relates closely with one of the factors that cause Jack's NPD. It was stated that person with NPD tend to split off their perceived weaknesses into the hidden part of the self causing them to swing between extremes of grandiosity and feelings of emptiness and worthlessness. This apparently is related to the previous discussion about the origin of Jack Merridew's Narcissistic Personality Disorder. The evidence can be seen on how Jack reacts after he boasts about himself and people do not choose him to be Chief. The freckles on his face "disappeared under a blush of mortification" (Golding, 1954: 16).

Jack also becomes obsessed with catching pigs. At first he fails to catch and kill one which make this his incompetence and Ralph calling him out on this. In this situation Jack does a sort of self-defence mechanism (acting out): "you should stick a pig...why didn't you?"; "I was going to... I was choosing a place. Next time--!"; he snatched his knife out of the sheath and slammed them into a tree trunk. Next time there would be no

mercy. He looked round fiercely, daring them to contradict..."(Golding, 1954: 23). This injured his self-esteem and made him ambitious to catch pigs to prove himself and repair his self-esteem. There is his grandiosity that also makes for his obsession, as seen in: "rescue? Yes of course! All the same, I'd like to catch a pig first—he snatched up his spear and dashed it into the ground. The opaque, mad look came into his eyes again..." (Golding, 1954: 41). His obsession to catch a pig might also be one of the defence mechanisms he experiences (sublimation/dissociation) to channel his pain of being marooned on island, and might never be rescued, into an activity that would channel this frustration. The thought of outsmarting a living thing and imposing his will upon it, his grandiosity, as seen above shows that it allures him towards violent tendency.

Individuals with NPD see themselves as special/unique and should associate only with those of high status or "special" people. Jack feels other people should be of high status or "special" to be associated with him. This mind set helps individuals with NPD to enhance their self-esteem by "the idealized value" they assign to people they are associated with. His attitude towards seeing Ralph for the first time shows that he doesn't see Ralph as his equal thus shouldn't associate with him and cannot serve to enhance his self-esteem, as seen in: "what he saw of the fair-haired boy with creamy shell on his knees did not seem to satisfy him"(Golding, 1954: 14).

His belief of being special and lack of empathy makes Jack see Piggy in low regard. As mentioned in DSM-V about NPD that individuals with NPD "are often contemptuous and impatient with others who talk about their own problems and concerns."(American Psychiatric Association, 2013). It is seen in how he is often annoyed when Piggy speaks up, and immediately tries to silence Piggy: "went on Piggy, 'that boy—I forget—'you're talking too much,' said Jack Merridew. 'shut up, fatty.'"(Golding, 1954: 15), as Piggy is fat, has asthma, can't do much of hard work and wears glasses, thus seemed weak and needy in his eyes.

During Jack's and Ralph's experience together he begins to see qualities in Ralph such as his good look and the boys admire him so he begins to agree

with him as seen in: "Ralph took the conch...'we've got to have special people for looking after the fire. Any day there may be a ship out there'| 'I agree with Ralph. We've got to have rules and obey them. After all, we're not savages. We're English, and the English are best at everything..."(Golding, 1954: 33). From this quotation, notice how when Ralph says "special people" Jack voluntarily agrees with him because his self-esteem is boosted, and further Jack displays his belief that he is of the best/superior group of people in the world by regarding English people as the best which shows his grandiosity, his narcissism. His manipulateness is also the reason why he relates to Ralph in front of others because it seems likely to enhance his image of self and make his image look good to others.

Narcissists require admiration from others rather excessively. They often fish for others' attention. It can be seen from how Jack acts generously for the sake of a compliment from his peers: "Ralph, I'll split up the choir--my hunters, that is--into groups, and we'll be responsible for keeping the fire going--' This generosity brought a spatter of applause from the boys, so that Jack grinned at them, then waved the conch for silence."(Golding, 1954: 33). It is even more evidently shown in: "then he said nothing for a time but breathed fiercely so that they were awed by him and looked at each other in uneasy admiration."(Golding, 1954: 104). People with NPD seek and need attention and admiration from others to reinforce their fragile self-esteem. This fragile self-esteem makes them very vulnerable to defeat or criticism. This symptom has been shown several times in the novel when Jack faces criticism and defeat. It can be seen first when he loses to Ralph in the first election that makes his face redden under great shame. And Ralph handles this situation by appealing to Jack's ego, giving him the choir to lead.

His sense of entitlement and lack of sensitivity to the needs of others make him exploitative. When Jack is on duty to care for the smoke signal, he feels that what he wants should be prioritized. So he neglects his duty and gathers other kids, even the ones left keeping the smoke alive, to hunt with him. He expects others to defer to him as seen in: "'we'll go hunting everyday—'you let the fire go out.' This repetition made Jack uneasy. He looks at the twins and then back at Ralph, 'we

had to have them in the hunt,' he said, 'or there wouldn't have been enough for a ring.'" (Golding, 1954: 53). Jack does something wrong which costs him the chance of being rescued, this already puts a stress on him plus the confrontation from Ralph this time without considering his ego, which hurt his self-esteem as he "went very red" as the littluns begin crying. "you and your blood Jack Merridew! you and your hunting! we might have gone home—" (Golding, 1954: 54). American Psychiatrists Association states: "vulnerability in self-esteem makes individuals with narcissistic personality disorder very sensitive to 'injury' from criticism or defeat... they may react with disdain, rage, or defiant counter attack." (2013: 671). This is exemplified in the novel when Jack knocks Piggy's glasses off his face for calling him out for letting the fire out (Golding, 1954: 54).

Jack underestimates Piggy because he thinks Piggy isn't special and now he receives criticism from someone he despises and his hunters join in on it, this hurts his pride really badly. He has been resenting Ralph but he cannot express his frustration towards Ralph because he's the chief. So when Piggy speaks, he channels his rage, his counter attack, towards Piggy. This is also him doing self-defence mechanism: displacement. In this scene we can see how his NPD influence his behaviour:

After his violent act towards his fellow human being, Jack further mocks Piggy by mimicking his whine. Another demonstration of his lack of sensitivity to others. This mockery brings laughter from the hunters so Jack's self-esteem is lifted and he continues this act to get attention to repair his injured self-esteem. "Piggy and the parody were so funny that the hunters began to laugh. Jack felt encouraged. He went on scrambling and the laughter rose to a gale of hysteria." (Golding, 1954: 55).

There is a moment in the novel where Jack apologizes for his behaviour, but knowing that he has Narcissistic Personality Disorder we must not take it as it is and look into it. As discussed in the paragraph above, Jack has his ego hurt, he expresses his distress on Piggy. Luckily, he gains sympathy from other kids which heals his ego and only after that does he apologize, seeing also that this good act will aid to his image (Golding, 1954:

55), as stated by Bardenstein, that a narcissistic person insincerely apologizes for the sake of saving image (Golding, 1954: 3).

Up the mountain, when they rebuild the fire for meat, Jack seems very uplifted. He starts giving orders and preparing feast with others, while Ralph stays still and silent. "...Ralph was silent. No one would ask him to move and in the end they had to build the fire three yards away and in a place not so convenient...so Ralph asserted his chieftainship... against this weapon, so indefinable and so effective, Jack was powerless and raged without knowing why." (Golding, 1954: 55). With this act Ralph asserts his dominance and puts Jack in his position. Jack realizes his position and it opens up an old wound. The wound that he's not chief, that he hasn't the highest authority to rule, and that he is still "below" someone else. It hurts his ego, and once again his grandiose sense of self-importance is threatened.

When Jack tries to be reelected for chief position no one sides with him. In all his fear of the beast, he pours it out on Ralph, blaming Ralph for their misery and demanding that he steps down from his position. Jack is already in his most vulnerable state here from the fear caused by the beast and it gets worse by the social rejection and humiliation adding more wound to his ego. In this scene Golding describes quite clearly about Jack's personality and how he reacts to environment or society.

After Jack separates himself from Ralph and gains his own authority and total freedom it is obvious what he will do next. He exercises his power at will, he starts his complete domination over all individuals on the island. His behaviour from that point onwards shows a complete disregard toward social norms, at this point Jack has become a true savage. What's worse is that Jack also allows other kids to express their desire and instinct limitlessly.

From the analysis on Jack's NPD traits, it shows that he has Id-dominant personality. His fragile Self makes him vulnerable to any forms of attacks towards his self. These factors influence the way he behaves and his ego defense mechanisms when facing unpleasant situations. They bring him to discriminate others he sees as "different". It can be seen in how he treats Piggy and later Ralph because Ralph associates closely with Piggy.

Jack Merridew's Narcissistic Personality Disorder and Its Relations To His Violent Behaviour

The writers assume that Jack's violent behaviour is due to his Narcissistic Personality Disorder. As to how Narcissistic individuals react with violence against ego threats, Bardenstein (2009) argues that it's due to their ego being impaired. It means that they have poor ability to connect with or to feel empathy toward other people, to recognize that others also have feeling and thought like themselves. (Bardenstein, 2009). His Id and impaired Ego play major part in it. It makes him a person with little to no conscience who ignores social norm. Bardenstein further contends that "the inflated sense of self impairs the development of a normal conscience (or superego) since any acknowledgment of one's flaws or failure to meet expectations is unbearable." (Bardenstein 148). It can mean superego's control, in this condition, is absent in his psyche. With the absent of superego's control and impaired ego functioning Jack's Id can become totally unrestrained.

Someone's behaviour is the product of the work of his psyche. This impairment in the ego functioning affects that process of that judgement and decision making. The threats from outside cause the internal pressure to commit/retaliate with violence against the source. In someone with balanced healthy ego this impulse might be mitigated and would not result in violence behaviour. But such is not the case with Jack Merridew who suffered Narcissistic Personality Disorder. His heart's desire to hurt others who reject him is not being properly reviewed by the ego, because his ego is impaired and his superego is underdeveloped.

According to Schlesinger (1998) the violence done by Narcissistic individuals are rooted from the internal pressure to do so. Technically Jack doesn't go so far as to be categorized as serial murderer, but this theory still explains his violent behaviour. It is because of the sense of complete control he gets from overpowering his victim. This kind of motivation is portrayed in the analysis of the narcissistic traits of Jack Merridew when he commits his a violent act: "you got to join my tribe' ...'you lemme go!'... the chief snatched one of the few spears that were left and poked Sam in the ribs." (Golding, 1954: 140).

While Schlesinger argues that Narcissistic individuals' aggression resulted by pressure to do so from within, Twenge postulated that there are external factors to such aggression. So it's not solely the narcissistic desire for power that cause the violent behavior. Twenge's research offers another perspective on the relation between Narcissism and violence.

Researches show that there is indeed a solid link between NPD and violent behaviour (Twenge, 2003). Twenge stated in her article that the aggression or the violent behaviour done by Narcissistic individuals have tight connection to social rejection and humiliation. A narcissistic person blames and derogates others for the negative feedback they receive such behaviour can be seen in the book: "you can't sing, you talk like Piggy". Twenge further postulated that "violence was often a response to ego threats by persons with inflated self-views". As explained by Twenge, Narcissistic person aggresses against those who threaten their ego or self. "narcissists were more willing than non-narcissists to aggressively cause pain to the person issuing the insult." (Twenge, 2003).

Behind Narcissistic persons' grandiose sense of self there is an insecure self. When Narcissists face negative feedbacks it's this insecure self that is being threatened. Such is the case with Jack Merridew in *LotF*. Being with NPD, he cannot afford being pathetic. In his reality he has to be the grand champion. When he faces negative feedbacks such as, social rejection and humiliation from his peers it's basically him facing a threat against his very own existence, that would cause it to crumble. This initiates his antisocial behaviour including the violent ones. (Golding, 1954: 124&142).

According to Bardenstein's article, a narcissist's impaired ego functioning contributes to his behaviour, it interferes with their ability to connect with others. In reference to Schlesinger's article, Jack's violent behaviour is based on his internal desire for total power. He hurts and tortures others to dominate them, gaining satisfaction from being superior to them. While that is true, according to Twenge this behaviour is also motivated by external sources that cause the feeling of rejection and humiliation, the threats against his self, which lead to the retaliation against the perpetrator. If we relate it to novel, it appears that Jack Merridew

depends on his 'pride' for his sense of worth as presented in the previous discussion. Jack reacts in violence whenever his 'pride' is threatened by external sources. The writers conclude the internal and external arguments do not contradict each other. They are actually intertwined to provide us ways to analyze the relationship between Jack's narcissism and his violent behaviour.

CONCLUSION

This novel, *Lord Of The Flies*, offers us a view on damaging effects Narcissistic Personality Disorder and how it can only be apprehended by strongly

established social norms. We don't even assume that William Golding was familiar of psychological research on Narcissistic Personality Disorder but he somehow managed to portray the dark side of human nature in psychology. Learning about Narcissistic Personality Disorder, what possibly cause it, and how it is related to violent behaviour as represented in *Lord of the Flies* gives us insights regarding human's nature. We can learn about one of the roots of violent behavior by tracing the NPD back to its origin and prevent it at its root from growing.

REFERENCES

- American Psychiatric Association: *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*. 5th ed., American Psychiatric Association, 2013.
- Anoosheh, Sayed M. et al. "William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*: A Satirical Analysis of Fantasized Dystopia." *International Journal of English Language, Literature and Translation Studies*, Vol. 6, Issue 2, 2018.
- Bardenstein, K. K. "The Cracked Mirror: Features of Narcissistic Personality Disorder in Children." 2009.
- Bleiberg, Efrain. "Normal and Pathological Narcissism in Adolescence." *AMERICAN JOURNAL OF PSYCHOTHERAPY*, vol. 48, 1994.
- Bufkin, E. C. "Lord of the Flies: An Analysis." *The Georgia Review*, vol. 19, 1965, pp. 40–57.
- Brummelman, E., et al. "Origins of Narcissism in Children." *Psychological And Cognitive Sciences*, 2015.
- Cloninger, Susan. 'Conceptual Issues in Personality Theory'. *The Cambridge Handbook of Personality Psychology*, edited by Philip J. Corr and Gerald Matthews, Cambridge University Press, 2009, pp. 3-26.
- Danni, M A. "William Golding and Lord of the Flies." Vol. 3, no. 1, 31 July 2015.
- Cherry, Kendra. "The History of Narcissistic Personality Disorder." Verywellmind, 10 July 2019, <https://www.verywellmind.com/the-history-of-narcissistic-personality-disorder-2795569>.
- Freud, Sigmund. *The Ego and the Id*. 1923, www.sigmundfreud.net/the-ego-and-the-id-pdf-ebook.jsp.
- Golding, William. *Lord of the Flies*. Penguin Books, 1954.
- Guerin, W. L. *A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature*. 5th ed., Oxford University Press, 2005.
- Hamby, Sherry. "On Defining Violence and Why It Matters." *Psychology of Violence*, Vol. 7, No. 2, 2017, pp 167-180.
- Jacquin, Kristine M. "Violence." *Encyclopaedica Britannica*, Encyclopædia Britannica Inc., 27 January 2017, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/violence>.
- Kernberg, P. F., Weiner, A. S., Bardenstein, K. K., *Personality Disorders in Children and Adolescents*. New York: Basic Books, 2000.
- Schlesinger, Louis B. "Pathological Narcissism and Serial Homicide: Review and Case Study." *Current Psychology: Developmental, Learning, Personality, Social*, vol. 17, 1998, pp. 212–221.

Singh, Paramvir. "The Problem of Evil in *Lord of the Flies*." *International Journal of English Language, Literature and Translation Studies*, Vol. 2, Issue 3, 2015.

Twenge, J. M. "Isn't It Fun to Get the Respect That We're Going to Deserve?' Narcissism, Social Rejection, and Aggression." 2003.

Tyminski, Robert. "Misreading Narcissus." *International Journal of Jungian Studies*, Vol. 8, Issue 3, 2016, pp. 159-167.